Polka Theatre Safeguarding Children Policy and Procedures

Overall Statement

The key guidance for child protection is Working together to safeguard children (Department for Education, 2026 - Working together to safeguard children - GOV.UK). This states:

- everyone who works with children has a responsibility for keeping them safe
- everyone who comes into contact with children and families has a role to play in sharing information and identifying concerns.

As a venue dedicated to children, the safety and protection of children is paramount. Our Board of Trustees and all staff employed by Polka Theatre have a duty of care to children and young people who visit our theatre and attend our activities. We recognise our commitment to safeguard and promote children's welfare and follow a policy of best practice that protects them. This policy applies to all staff, including senior managers and the board of trustees, paid staff, freelancers, volunteers, students and anyone else working on behalf of Polka.

The purpose of this policy is:

- to provide protection for the children and young people who visit our theatre and take part in our activities
- to provide staff and third parties who support our work (whether as actors, directors or otherwise) with a set of principles to adopt to protect children and to provide guidance on procedures they should adopt in the event that they suspect a child or young person may be experiencing, or be at risk of, harm.

Polka recognises :

- the welfare of the child/young person is paramount, as enshrined in the ChildrenAct1989
- all children and young people, regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religious belief, sex, sexual orientation or identity have the right to equal protection from all types of harm or abuse.
- some children are additionally vulnerable because of the impact of previous experiences, their levels of dependency, communication needs or other issues
- the additional risks and vulnerability factors for LGBTQ+ children and young people.
- working in partnership with children, young people, their parents, carers and other agencies is essential in promoting young people's welfare.

We will seek to keep children and young people safe by:

- valuing them, listening to and respecting them
- appointing a Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) for children and young people, deputies and lead board member for safeguarding
- adopting child protection and safeguarding practices through procedures and a code of conduct for all staff and volunteers
- developing and implementing an effective e-safety policy and related procedures
- providing effective management for staff and volunteers through supervision, support, training and quality assurance measures
- safe recruitment of staff and volunteers, ensuring all necessary checks are made recording and storing information professionally and securely, and sharing information about safeguarding and good practice with children, their families, staff and volunteers via posters and discussions
- using our safeguarding procedures to share concerns and relevant information with agencies who need to know, and involving children, young people, parents, families and carers appropriately
- creating and maintaining an anti-bullying environment and ensuring that we have a policy and procedure to help us deal effectively with any bullying that does arise
- ensuring that we have effective complaints and whistleblowing measures in place
- ensuring that we provide a safe physical environment for our children, young people, staff and volunteers, by applying health and safety measures in accordance with the law and regulatory guidance.
- Ensuring that we have a robust photo/film consent policy that secures permission from parents and young people before taking, using, or sharing images, ensuring compliance with data protection laws, and respecting their right to privacy

This document has been drawn up with guidance from the NSPCC and is based on the laws that seek to protect children, namely:

- Children Act 1989 and 2004
- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026
- United Convention of the Rights of the Child 1991
- Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026

The Head of Creative Learning is the Designated Safeguarding Lead.
Polly Simmonds
Director of Creative Learning
020 8545 8326 polly@polkatheatre.com

Trustee Lead for Safeguarding: Michael Bradley Head Teacher, Merton Abbey Primary School
Michael Bradley has overall responsibility for Child Protection at Polka Theatre.

Support Services:

Merton's Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)
Merton Civic Centre
London Road
Morden
SM4 5DX 020 8545 4226 and 020 8545 4227
mash@merton.gov.uk

The Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)
Merton's LADO John Shelley
020 8545 3633/ 020 8545 4993.

Police Station – Wimbledon
Hillside Team
Wimbledon Police Station
15 Queens Road
Wimbledon
SW19 8NN
020 8721 2458

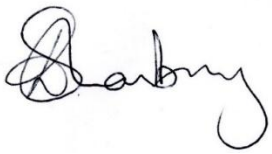
NSPCC help line for adults - 0808 800 5000

Child Line - 0800 1111

We are committed to reviewing our policy and good practice every year. This policy was last reviewed on 14th July 2026.

Signed:

Polly Simmonds, Director of Creative Learning (Designated Safeguarding Lead)



Signed:

Lynette Shanbury, Executive Director

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Role description for Designated Safeguarding Lead

Purpose of the role

- To raise the profile and promote the safety and welfare of children and young people involved in Polka's activities across the organisation.
- To take the lead in ensuring that appropriate arrangements for keeping children and young people safe are in place at Polka.
- To develop a culture of safeguarding at all levels in the organisation.

Duties and responsibilities

- Make sure that all safeguarding issues concerning children and young people who take part in Polka's activities are responded to appropriately through policies, procedures and administrative systems.
- Make sure that everyone working or volunteering with or for children and young people at Polka, understands the procedures and know what to do if they have concerns about a child's welfare.
- Make sure children and young people who are involved in activities at Polka and their parents know who they can talk to if they have a welfare concern and understand what action the organisation will take in response.
- Receive and record information from anyone who has concerns about a child who takes part in Polka's activities.
- Take the lead on responding to information that may constitute a child protection concern. This includes assessing and clarifying the information and making referrals to statutory organisations as appropriate, consulting with and informing the relevant members of the organisation - in line with the organisation's safeguarding policy and procedures.
- Store and retain child protection records according to legal requirements and the organisation's safeguarding policy and procedures.
- Liaise with, pass on information to and receive information from statutory child protection agencies, such as the local authority children's social care department and the police. This includes making formal referrals to these agencies when necessary.
- Consult the NSPCC Helpline when support is needed.
- Report regularly to the management committee on issues relating to safeguarding to ensure that safeguarding is understood to be the responsibility of the entire management committee.
- Be familiar with and work within inter-agency child protection procedures developed by the local safeguarding children board.
- Be familiar with issues relating to child protection and abuse and keep up to-date with new developments in this area.
- Attend regular training in issues relevant to child protection and share knowledge from that training with everyone who works or volunteers with or for children and young people at Polka.

- Attend team meetings, supervision sessions and management meetings as arranged.
- Work flexibly as may be required and carry out any other reasonable duties.
- Appointment to this role is subject to satisfactory vetting and DBS checks.

Safer Recruitment of Staff and Training

- All Polka staff will undergo enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks. These are renewed every three years.
- All Polka Trustees will undergo enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks. These are renewed every three years.
- All Polka volunteers who are in contact with children during their role, including those who are part of our Visitor Services team, will undergo enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks. This must be completed, at the latest, before the volunteer undertakes their fourth volunteering shift (following the volunteer trial period during which they will be supervised). These are renewed every three years.
- Whether placement students require a DBS check will be determined on a case-by-case basis by our Designated Safeguarding Lead.
- All workshop leaders are DBS checked before beginning work at Polka to ensure they are within a 3-year period.
- All Actors, Stage Managers and technical team members who go into schools to perform Polka productions will undergo enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks.
- Polka Theatre adopts safer recruitment procedures, including interviewing applicants, investigating an applicant's employment history and taking up of two references prior to appointment.
- All applicants for these posts will be asked to sign a declaration stating that there is no reason why they would be considered unsuitable to work with children and MUST declare all previous convictions (whether spent or not) as well as any cases pending against them. All such information is treated in confidence and will not be used against applicants unfairly.
- At interview for posts relating to workshop delivery or working directly with children, competence-based questions pertaining to good practice in Child Protection are asked.
- Referees should be asked specifically about the applicant's suitability to work with children.
- Disclosure and Barring Service checks must be obtained by Polka Theatre for new members of staff as appropriate. The appointment of staff that work with children can only be formally confirmed after this check is received.
- All new staff receive initial training on the issue of child protection as part of their induction to Polka. They also receive a copy of our Safeguarding Children Policy and are required to read it r and sign a declaration stating their intention to observe the policy.
- The DSL and Deputies will attend an equivalent of Level 3 Safeguarding Training. This will be renewed every 2 years.

- All members of Senior Management Team will attend an equivalent of Level 2 Safeguarding Training. This will be renewed every 3 years.
- All Polka staff including the Visitor Services Team and volunteers will receive in-house Safeguarding Training delivered by DSL and Deputies within 6 months of starting at Polka and will have annual opportunities to refresh their training. For Creative Learning roles and Visitors Service Team it must be refreshed every 2 years. For all other staff it must be refreshed every 3 years.
- All Polka Trustees will attend in-house Safeguarding Training within their first year of joining the Board. Trustees may also do relevant training such as the NSPCC Trustee Safeguarding Training.
- All volunteers are encouraged to attend the regular in-house Safeguarding Training delivered by DSL and Deputies every 6 months
- All Lead Practitioners must have attended an equivalent of Level 1 training. Proof of attendance (certificate) needs to be shown to DSL. This must be renewed every 2 years.
- If facilitating courses where we consider there is a higher risk of child safeguarding issues arising, practitioners must attend a Level 2 course. This must be renewed every 2 years.
- All staff are alerted to their individual responsibility to protect children both directly in the context of their duties and to the extent they encounter children whether on a planned or unplanned basis in the context of their duties at Polka.

Code of conduct for staff and volunteers

Purpose

This behaviour code outlines the conduct we expect of all our staff and volunteers. This includes agency staff, interns, students on work placement and anyone who is subcontracted to undertake specific duties. The behaviour code aims to help us protect children and young people from abuse and reduce the possibility of unfounded allegations being made.

The role of staff and volunteers

When working with or for children and young people, you are acting in a position of trust. You are likely to be seen as a role model and must act appropriately.

Responsibility

You are responsible for:

- prioritising the welfare of children and young people
- providing a safe environment for children and young people. This includes:
  a) ensuring equipment is used safely and for its intended purpose
  b) having good awareness of issues to do with safeguarding and child protection and taking action when appropriate
- following our principles, policies and procedures
  a) This includes policies and procedures for child protection/safeguarding, whistleblowing and e-safety
- staying within the law at all times
- modelling good behaviour for children and young people to follow

- challenging all unacceptable behaviour and reporting any breaches of the behaviour code to the DSL.
- reporting all allegations/suspicions of abuse following our reporting procedures. This includes abusive behaviour being displayed by a child and directed at anybody of any age.

Rights

You should:

- treat children and young people fairly and without prejudice or discrimination
- understand that children and young people are individuals with individual needs
- respect differences in gender, sexual orientation, culture, race, ethnicity, disability and religious belief systems between yourself and others, and appreciate that all participants bring something valuable and different to the group/organisation
- challenge discrimination and prejudice
- be aware that LGBTQ+ children and young people face the same risks as all children and young people, but they are at greater risk of some types of abuse. For example, they might experience homophobic, biphobic or transphobic bullying or hate crime
- encourage young people to speak out about attitudes or behaviour that makes them uncomfortable.

Relationships

You should:

- promote relationships that are based on openness, honesty, trust and respect
- avoid favouritism
- be patient with others
- use special caution when you are discussing sensitive issues with children or young people
- ensure your contact with children and young people is appropriate and relevant to the work of the project you are involved in
- ensure there is always more than one adult present during activities with children and young people
  a) if this isn't possible, ensure that you are within sight or hearing of other adults
- only provide personal care in an emergency and make sure there is more than one adult present if possible.

Respect

You should:

- listen to and respect children at all times
- value and take children's contributions seriously, actively involving them in planning activities wherever possible
- respect a young person's right to personal privacy as far as possible
  a) in some cases it may be necessary to break confidentiality in order to follow child protection procedures; if this is the case it is important to explain this to the child or young person at the earliest opportunity.

Unacceptable behaviour

When working with children and young people, you must not:

- allow concerns or allegations to go unreported

- take unnecessary risks
- smoke, consume alcohol or use illegal substances
- develop inappropriate relationships with children and young people
- make inappropriate promises to children and young people
- engage in behaviour that is in any way abusive
  a) this includes having any form of sexual contact with a child or young person
- let children and young people have your personal contact details (mobile number, email or address) or have contact with them via a personal social media account
- act in a way that can be perceived as threatening or intrusive
- patronise or belittle children and young people
- make sarcastic, insensitive, derogatory or sexually suggestive comments or gestures to or in front of children and young people.

Upholding this code of behaviour

You should always follow this code of behaviour and never rely on your reputation or that of our organisation to protect you. If you have behaved inappropriately, you will be subject to our disciplinary procedures. Depending on the seriousness of the situation, you may be asked to leave Polka We may also make a referral to statutory agencies such as the police and/or the local authority children's social care department.

If you become aware of any breaches of this code, you must report them to Polly Simmonds (DSL/ Director of Creative Learning). To do this you should follow the whistle-blowing procedure or, if necessary, the child protection/safeguarding procedures.

Child Protection Procedures

The following procedures apply to all Polka staff and will be covered by training to enable staff to understand their role and responsibility.

The aim of our procedures is to provide a robust framework which enables staff to take appropriate action when they are concerned that a child is being harmed or abused or at risk of harm or abuse.

If a member of staff suspects abuse, spots signs or indicators of abuse or they have a disclosure of abuse made to them they must report it by filling out an initial report form and give it to the DSL immediately. If the DSL is unavailable please contact the deputies. The DSL is aware that it is vitally important that any disclosure made in confidence is recorded factually as soon as possible and that an accurate account should be made of:

- The date and time of what has occurred
- The names of people involved
- What was said or done by whom (use actual words and phrases used by the child)
- Any injuries identified on a body map

- Any action taken to gather information and what steps have been taken
- Any further action
- Names of person reporting and to whom reported.

Responsibilities
The DSL will use appropriate reporting systems for the situation. This may be reporting the matter to the Merton LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer). Report forms can be found in all offices and completed forms are kept in a safe locked place to ensure confidentiality.

If it is thought that returning the child home would put the child in immediate danger, advice will be sought from the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub [MASH] or in their absence other appropriate agencies.

What to do if you suspect a member of Polka staff

- Polka staff members are able to share concerns they may have about another member of staff or a volunteer, even if there is no specific incident of abuse or simply an unspecified concern or 'nagging doubt'. Staff members who in good faith report their concerns that a colleague may be or is abusing a child, will be fully supported.
- Any allegations of abuse will be fully recorded and reported appropriately and every effort will be made to maintain confidentiality for all concerned. Appropriate support will be offered to the child, parents and members of staff.
- We will follow guidance provided by ACAS when undertaking staff investigations and suspension.
- Suspension of the member of Staff, against whom an allegation has been made, needs careful consideration, and Polka Theatre will seek the advice from the LADO before deciding on the course of action to be taken.
- Suspension of a staff member does not indicate guilt in their part. It is a step taken to protect children while any investigation is taking place and Polka are seeking to establish the facts of the situation.

Responding to disclosures and concerns both off and on site

In the event that a child or young people discloses something to you, or you have cause for concern for their welfare; you must follow Polka's reporting procedure. Treat any allegations extremely seriously and report any concerns to the DSL immediately.

Below are 5 steps to follow if a child or young person discloses to you:

1. Listen and Believe
2. Reassure and Record
3. Do Not Confront
4. Explain
5. Report

1. **Listen carefully and believe them.** Do not express your own views and do not ask questions other than for clarification. Do not promise to keep secrets but make it clear that you believe what they are saying is true. Do not say anything that makes the child feel responsible for the abuse. Do not interrupt the child, ask leading questions, change the subject or interrogate the child. It is the job of the experienced police and social services to investigate the situation.

2. **Reassure and record.** Tell them they are doing the right thing by telling you and say that you need to take some notes about what they are saying. It is important to use the child's words. If this isn't possible at the time, write down the incident as soon as possible. Be specific in your notes. Generalised language can be the difference between a child receiving ongoing support or not.

3. **Do not talk to the alleged or suspected abuser.** This could make the situation much worse for the child.

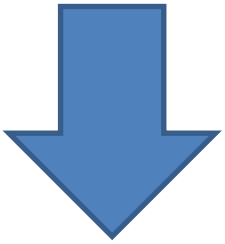
4. **Explain what you are going to do next.** Tell the child that you must pass this information on to someone who can help. If you feel the child is in immediate danger or at risk of significant harm, keep them with you and inform the DSL immediately.

5. **Report the disclosure or concern immediately** to the DSL (Polly Simmonds) or one of the deputies in her absence. Lynette Shanbury, Jemima Deboo-Sands, Woonie Chan, Ruth Cowell, Emma Harvey and Dominic Hedges are CP deputies. Do not discuss the matter with anyone other than the Child Protection team.

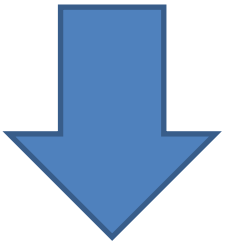
Polka's procedure for reporting a child protection disclosure or concern is simple.

If working **on site at Polka**, please follow the steps below:

Complete a Child Protection Incident Report Form and give it to the DSL within 24 hours



If you feel the child is in immediate danger or at risk of significant harm, keep the child with you. If the DSL is absent, inform one of the deputies immediately and hand the completed form to them.

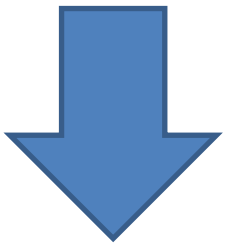


Once you have given the form to the DSL or a deputy, it is unlikely you will need to take any further action. The DSL will inform you should they need any further information from you. Do not discuss the matter with anyone other than the CP team and remember they are there to support you.

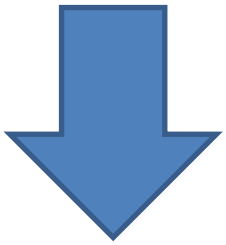
If working **off site (i.e. in a community setting or school)**, please follow the steps below:

You must speak to the Designated Safeguarding Lead **before you leave the premises.** The setting will have their own procedures which you will need to follow; this may include completing a form for them.

If you believe the child is in immediate danger or at risk of significant harm, keep the child with you. Do not leave the premises until you are satisfied that the DLS is responding to the matter.



You must Complete a Child Protection Incident Record Form. This must be completed and returned to the DSL at Polka **within 24 hours.**



If you send the completed form to the DSL via email, you must write the following in the subject "Confidential: Safeguarding Concern". Do not use names in the body of the email as this is not secure.

Storage of personal information both off and on site

- Personal information that is acquired or held in the course of working with children should be treated as confidential. Particular care should be taken with sensitive information.
- Consideration should also be given to the Data Protection Act 2018, read alongside the UK GDPR which requires that information is obtained and processed fairly and lawfully; that it is accurate, relevant and not held for longer than is necessary; and kept securely.
- Polka Theatre uses the Disclosure and Barring Service to help assess the suitability of applicants for positions of trust, Polka Theatre complies fully with the DBS Code of Practice regarding the correct handling, use, storage, retention and disposal of Disclosures and Disclosure Information. Polka Theatre uses an Umbrella Body to process DBS checks in England.
- Disclosure information will never be kept in an applicant's personnel file and is only passed to those who are authorised to receive it.
- We recognise that it is a criminal offence to pass this information to anyone who is not entitled to receive it.

E-Safety

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to protect children and young people who engage with Polka and participate in our activities, and who make use of information technology such as mobile phones, games consoles and the internet, as part of their involvement with us. It is also to provide staff and volunteers with the overarching principles that guide our approach to e-safety and to ensure that as an organisation we operate in line with our values and within the law in terms of how we use information technology and behave online.

We will seek to keep children and young people safe by:

- encouraging children and young people attending Polka activities to use the opportunities offered by the internet and social media in a way that keeps themselves safe and shows respect for others
- incorporating statements about safe and appropriate ICT use and online behaviour into the codes of conduct for both staff and volunteers and for children and young people
- use our procedures to deal firmly, fairly and decisively with any examples of inappropriate ICT use or behaviour, complaints or allegations, whether by an adult or a child/young person (these may include breaches of filtering, illegal use, downloading or creating indecent images of children, cyberbullying, or use of ICT to groom a child or to perpetrate abuse)
- informing parents and carers of incidents of concern as appropriate
- reviewing and updating the security of our information systems regularly

- providing adequate physical security for ICT equipment
- ensuring that user names, logins and passwords are used effectively
- using only official email accounts provided via Polka and monitoring these as necessary
- ensuring that the personal information of staff, volunteers, and participants (including participant names) are not published on our website
- ensuring that images of children, young people and families are used only after their appropriate permission has been obtained, and only for the purpose for which consent has been given
- ensuring that any instance of cyberbullying is recorded and reported in line with Polka's Anti-bullying policy.

Photographic and video permission

As a venue dedicated to children, Polka recognises the importance of true, fully informed photo/video consent and understands that we may encounter vulnerable children whose whereabouts need to be protected.

Photographs and videos featuring children are to be taken and used within the following parameters:

- Consent has been given by the parent/carer.
- Consent is given by completing the *Polka Theatre Photo and Film Consent Form* (unless event is in a public area of Polka – please see final point for details).
- As part of a Polka workshop or event (on and offsite).
- If agreed in advance with Director of Creative Learning /or Head of Marketing/or Participation Manager.
- By a contracted photographer or an agreed Polka staff member using a Polka device. If this is not possible this must be expressly discussed with the Director of Creative Learning or Head of Marketing in advance, and any photos/videos taken on personal devices will be uploaded to the Polka database at the earliest opportunity (within 24 hours). All photos/video will then be deleted from the device. Not used by Polka staff (including workshop leaders) for personal or promotional purposes i.e. on social media.
- Stored safely and securely on Polka's database, with all folders named in the following format: *Name of Event / Date / Name of photographer*. No names of the children included. Consent forms scanned and included in the same folder as photos/videos.
- Not used for marketing purposes if taken over 5 years ago. These must be archived. Occasionally, we may use older images, for example if we revive an old production, create an exhibition or archive our history as the UK's first dedicated children's theatre.

- Audience members and parents/carers attending 'sharings' and performances of children's work are requested to take photos or videos of their own child and not shared via any social media platform.
- For events without the attendance of a parent/carer (e.g. weekly clubs at Polka and school workshops) the Photo and Film Consent Form should be completed by parents/carers of all children and young people in advance. If this is not possible or consent is refused, these children will not feature.
- Consent can be withdrawn at any time; Polka are obliged to remove these photos and videos from use and delete from files, except for printed materials in current circulation.
- If the public areas of Polka are being photographed or video recorded, staff should make sure that everyone involved is aware. i.e. signage, verbal consent, announcements and pre-show emails. Should they not wish to give consent, all customers should be given the option to wear a sticker so they can be edited out of any shots. A note will be included in the photo and film folder to confirm that signage was on display, rather than individual consent forms.

Social media

- Polka social media channels are managed by our Marketing Department who will operate in-line with our separate social media policy.
- Polka Staff (including workshop leaders) must not interact with children or young people outside of Polka activities, including via social media. This includes being "followed by" or "friends with" children and young people on social media platforms.
- Polka Staff (including workshop leaders) must not exchange personal phone numbers or email addresses with children and young people. All communication should be between parent/carer and the relevant staff member at Polka i.e. Box Office or Creative Learning, and will go through the appropriate channels which are Polka telephone and email accounts.

General visits to Polka Theatre

- Polka Theatre is a public space. All Polka staff are aware of the need to protect children who visit Polka. Relevant Polka staff are trained to deal with children in emergencies and will be present when children are on the premises. The presence of Polka staff does not replace the need for parents or carers to supervise the children in their care while on Polka premises.
- Parents and guardians must stay with their children at all times, including in the adventure theatre, main theatre, playground, garden and café.
- With the exception of participatory workshops, unaccompanied children under 16 will not be admitted to the theatre.
- All Polka staff wear a name badge and are easily identifiable. Front of House and Creative Learning Practitioners wear branded Polka t-shirts and are specifically alerted to the need to be friendly and approachable to children visiting Polka. Lost children should contact an easily identifiable member of staff.
- If a child is thought to be lost, Polka staff will approach the child and look for the nearby parent/guardian. Lost children will be accompanied to the box office where an announcement will be made. If a person is thought to be behaving suspiciously our incident reporting policy will be implemented.
- Polka Theatre has full Public Liability Insurance.
- Risk assessment of our premises and activities is carried out on a regular basis and action plans put in place to address specifically identified hazards and the means of eliminating or minimising them.

Accidents and illness

In the event of a child suffering an accident during a visit to Polka:
A member of staff trained in first aid will be on the premises during all public events. They will establish what further action needs to be taken and will put those measures in place.

- First Aid Kits are located around the building as detailed in our Health and Safety Policy.
- In most cases, injuries sustained can easily be treated by the first aider. If this is not the case the first aider will promptly contact the emergency services and the responsible parent/guardian and will ensure that the child is comforted until further help arrives. The first aider will stay with the family if possible.
- Details of all accidents are entered in an accident book, kept in the Front of House office. The accident book is reviewed quarterly by our Safety Team.
- Polka Theatre staff cannot administer any form of medication, including paracetamol or aspirin.

External hires/Visiting Companies

All external companies or hirers must accept and follow our Safeguarding Policy and procedures. All contracts for visiting companies and hirers will include the short précis of the Safeguarding Policy and adherence to this is a contractual requirement.

Polka's practice in working directly with children and young people

Parents can leave their child in a Polka Theatre session knowing that their safety is our priority.

The National Standards

- Polka Theatre workshop sessions comply with Ofsted's 14 National Standards for Out of School Care.
- Polka staff are aware of the company Health and Safety policy and equipment is checked regularly.

Ratio of Adults to Children

- Polka workshops for children aged 4 – 8, a leader, and two assistants. This is a minimum ratio of 1:7; the national guideline is 1:8.
- Ratios may need to be adjusted in light of the needs of particular children e.g. pupils with SENs might need a higher degree of support and therefore different adult ratios.
- A minimum of 2 adults are present in all Polka workshops for children aged 9+, a leader and a deputy. This is a minimum ratio of 1:10; the national guideline is 1:10.
- There are usually other members of staff on hand to help in an emergency.
- Children are always escorted by an adult when they need to leave the workshop room.
- Polka always ensures that written consent is given from parents/ carers if children or young people are taken off site or if they are travelling alone to and from Polka.
- Offsite workshops may differ slightly as there will be setting/school staff present. If delivering at a school as part of the school day, there will be one Polka practitioner delivering the session as the classroom teacher or teaching assistant will be present.

Codes of behaviour

- Parents/ carers will always be informed if staff have had to do things of a personal nature for a child such as changing clothing. Staff are alerted to the need to treat children with dignity and not to ask them to do anything which might embarrass them or be contrary to their cultural or religious precepts when these are known.
- Workshop staff are always informed of any changes regarding child protection laws or best practise by the Director of Creative Learning.
- Workshop staff understand that the language and tone they adopt are important factors in a child's sense of safety and reassurance. They are trained to consider the impact of the language used by others may have on children and of the need to

take steps to avoid a situation where language could be used to unsettle or intimidate children.

- Workshop staff and all those responsible for devising events are trained to consider the safety of the event they are responsible for, the appropriateness of the equipment to be used given the age and ability of the children expected to attend the workshop and of the need to take steps to eliminate any activity or equipment that could endanger the children attending the event.
- During workshops, we encourage independent learning and adults should have minimal physical contact with children. In drama it is sometimes necessary to have some physical contact when demonstrating exercises or joining in activities to encourage others but staff should be mindful of what/how much contact is appropriate. Where possible staff should demonstrate physical exercises with other workshop staff. Polka staff adhere to the NSPCC's Safe Touch guidelines. See appendix 7.
- Polka staff should discourage children from leaning, lying or sitting on them and other proximity-seeking behaviour. Children may need to be reassured, encouraged to engage with the session and asked not to hold onto/lean onto adults. Adults will take themselves away from a child who repeatedly tries to sit/lean on them. Behaviour like this should be reported to the DSL as this may be an indicator of other issues. Positive behaviour of other children will be rewarded to set an example of how we want children to behave with the adults in the room.
- All Polka staff must follow our Safe Touch Policy at all times, unless the child is at risk of hurting themselves or another person or in a medical emergency.
- During the workshops, we encourage all adults that phones are put away ensuring a phone-free environment throughout the session. We request that photos are not taken during the sessions at any time. All children and young people will be asked to put away their phones for the duration of the workshop.

Medical issues, emergencies and emergency contact details

- Parents/guardians complete emergency contact forms at point of booking their child onto a Polka workshop, no matter how short the session.
- Children will not be allowed to take part in the workshop if parents/guardians have not sent back the emergency contact form.
- The Participation Manager or Schools Manager will contact parents/guardians who have not returned their form, one week prior to the workshop/course, to remind them.
- We ask that parents/ guardians complete forms (not nannies or other carers) to ensure that all information is correct.
- Parents/guardians are asked to alert Polka staff before a visit if their child has any specific needs associated with their health or has access needs which will require Polka to make a reasonable adjustment in order to enable them to attend a Polka event. In such a circumstance the parent or guardian needs to let the Participation Manager or Schools Manager know. If any child has an allergy which may be affected by their visit they must let Polka know before attendance and ensure the carer or parent has any appropriate medicine that they can administer or knows what steps to take to ensure the safety of the child should the need arise.

If an accident or illness occurs during a Polka workshop

- The workshop leader or assistant will assess the situation and remove the child from the activity.
- Where appropriate the assistant will contact a first aider. The first aider will take action to administer first aid or contact the emergency services or arrange for the child to return home, depending on what is necessary. If a child does not need the emergency services, but the child continues to feel ill the assistant will contact the parent/guardian and request that the child is taken home.
- If a child needs to take medication or may need staff to administer medication the parent must discuss this with staff prior to the workshop. Polka staff will not be responsible for personal care unless specifically agreed in advance.

Breaks

- **Toilet breaks**: children are taken to the toilet if they need to go. The assistant will escort children to the toilet and wait outside.
- We advise that younger children are taken to the toilet before the workshop session.
- **Refreshment breaks**: During an hour-long workshop a break will not automatically be given. If a child informs the staff that they are thirsty or need the toilet their need will be met.
- During a workshop of more than one-hour regular toilet and refreshment breaks are provided.
- Lunches: During all-day workshops we request that children bring a packed lunch. Should a child arrive without a packed lunch the workshop staff will ensure that food is purchased for the child and the bill will be settled with the parent/carer after the workshop. Children are not permitted to leave the premises during lunch breaks and will be appropriately supervised.

Departure from the workshop

- Parents/carers must come to a designated area to pick up their children – the arrangements for collection will be made clear by the workshop assistant at the time of registration. They must inform the workshop leader that they have picked up their child and wait until their child has been signed out before leaving the premises. The emergency contact form has a space for the names of two people who the parent/carer will allow to pick up their child in their absence – if arrangements have been made for one of these two appointed adults to collect the child the workshop assistant must be notified at the time of registration. If for any reason the child is not picked up by the parent/carer and the emergency contacts are not contactable, we will contact CFH – Children and Families Hub and/or the police for further guidance.
- Workshop leaders are contracted to stay until all children are picked up by one of the registered carers, we expect parents to be on time or notify us beforehand if they are going to be late.
- Children will not be allowed off the premises to be picked up.

Anti-bullying policy

Polka Theatre acknowledges that bullying behaviour is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. We endeavour to ensure that a secure environment is provided for every child and young person who participates in our activities. Polka acknowledges that bullying can take place and may need to be addressed amongst any combination of persons regardless of their role.

Definition

The Anti Bullying Alliance defines bullying as the repetitive, intentional hurting of one person or group by another person or group, where the relationship involves an imbalance of power. Bullying can be physical, verbal or psychological. It can happen face-to-face or through cyberspace.

Bullying can be:

- Emotional - being deliberately unfriendly, excluding, tormenting (e.g. hiding possessions, using threatening gestures).
- Physical - pushing, hitting, kicking or any use of violence.
- Racist - racial taunts, graffiti, gestures
- Sexual - unwanted physical contact or sexually abusive comments
- Disability related – ridiculing a child because of their disability
- Homophobic - because of, or focusing on the issue of sexuality
- Religious - because of or focusing on the issue of faith
- Verbal - name-calling, sarcasm, spreading rumours , shouting or swearing
- Cyber - all areas of internet, such as e-mail and internet chat room, social media platform misuse mobile phone threats by text messaging and calls misuse of associated technology, i.e. camera and video facilities

Implementation

It is the responsibility of Polka's Board of Trustees, employees and workshop staff to ensure the implementation of the Anti-Bullying Policy to minimise occurrences of bullying. Workshop practitioners are mindful and aware of the need to guard against any unwanted behaviour in the sessions and should also encourage participants to report any instances of bullying.

As noted in our EDI policy, Polka has a zero-tolerance approach to racism. Polka recognises that racial discrimination operates at an individual, institutional and societal level. Whether overt or through unconscious bias, racism can occur at work and at activities run by Polka. Polka is committed to identifying and stopping this and ensuring we have a culture of trust, with safe spaces and systems, where children and young people experiencing racism feel confident to come forward and know that they will be listened to.

Workshop practitioners who are concerned about behaviour should alert the DSL. The seriousness of the situation will be determined and might include a discussion with individuals, or the involvement of parents. Where bullying has been established, a written record will be made and appropriate action taken.

Polka will provide appropriate awareness raising and training to all relevant staff to reinforce this policy and to provide skills and techniques to counter bullying behaviour.

Procedures

- Workshop leaders are mindful and aware of behaviour in the sessions and for on-site activity will report any unwanted behaviour to the Participation Manager and Polka DSL. If working off-site, workshop leaders will report any unwanted bahviour to the Schools Manager, the Community Manager andthe school or community group DSL and Polka DSL.Children are encouraged to report bullying behaviour (both against them and against others). Staff told about bullying by a child should alert the DSL.
- Incidents will be recorded by workshop practitioners, the Participation Manager if on site and the Schools Manager.
- In serious cases, parents will be informed and will be invited to meet to discuss the problem.
- In extreme cases, if necessary and appropriate, including in relation to 'cyber-bullying', police will be consulted
- The bullying behaviour or threats of bullying must be investigated and the bullying stopped quickly
- An attempt will be made to help the bully (bullies) change their behaviour and the bully (bullies) may be asked to genuinely apologise and other consequences may take place.
- In serious cases, the bully will be asked to leave.
- If possible, the participants will be reconciled
- After the incident(s) have been investigated and dealt with, each case will be monitored in striving to ensure repeated bullying does not take place

Record keeping and Monitoring

- It is important that a record is kept.
- All incidents should, ideally, be written up within 24 hours.
- Reports should be signed by the workshop practitioner, Participation Manager or Schools Manager or Communuty Manager and DSL.
- The DSL will take responsibility for the safe storage and processing of this information.
- All information gathered should be treated with strict confidentiality

Evaluation

Records of incidents are kept and used to inform future practice. Evaluation and review will ensure that Polka Theatre remains responsible to changing needs whilst striving to protect young people from bullying.

Mental Health

Polka has an important role to play in supporting the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people. We are committed to ensuring the safety and wellbeing of all children and will continue to provide a safe space for all children to attend.

Mental health problems can, in some cases, be an indicator that a child has suffered or is at risk of suffering abuse, neglect or exploitation. Although it is only appropriatly trained professionals who can diagnose mental health problems, our Polka staff may identify those whose behaviour suggests that they may be experiencing mental health problems or be at risk of developing one.

If any Polka staff have a mental health concern about a child, they must speak with the DSL or one of the deputies. It is vital that parents inform us if their child has a significant health condition of this nature to enable us to ensure that their child's needs are managed appropropriately whilst in our care.

Gender-Questioning Children

We acknowledge the new statutory guidance provides strict guidelines for children questioning their gender. We acknowledge the requirements that Polka staff will not initiate social transition and keep open dialogue with parents unless there is a safeguarding risk.

We offer single-sex facilities in the Polka building, within the physical parameters of our building.

Child-on-Child Abuse

At Polka we have a zero-tolerance approach to all forms of child-on-child abuse including sexual harassment, violence, and extreme misogyny. We believe that child-on-child abuse is never acceptable, and it will not be tolerated. We understand that certain children may face additional barriers to telling someone about abuse because of their vulnerability, disability, sex, ethnicity, and/or sexual orientation. In cases where child-on-child abuse is suspected or identified, Polka staff and workshop leaders will follow our child protection procedures.

Appendix 1

Definitions and types of abuse:

1. Physical abuse

Physical abuse 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 feigns the symptoms of, or deliberately causes ill health to, a child whom they are looking after. A person might do this because they enjoy or need the attention they get through having a sick child.

Physical abuse, as well as being a result of an act of commission can also be caused through the failure to act to protect.

Possible signs of abuse: Look for clusters of these signs:

- *Unexplained burns, broken bones, bite marks, cuts, bruises, or welts in the shape of an object.*
- *Resistance to going home.*
- *Fear of adults.*

Consider the possibility of physical abuse when the **parent or other adult caregiver**:

- *Offers conflicting, unconvincing, or no explanation for the child's injury.*
- *Describes the child as "evil," or in some other very negative way.*
- *Uses harsh physical discipline with the child.*
- *Has a history of abuse as a child.*
- *Speaks to the child in an intimidating manner*

2. Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional ill treatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve making a child feel or believe that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate or valued only in so far as they meet the needs of another person.

Possible signs of abuse:

- *Apathy, depression.*
- *Hostility*
- *Difficulty concentrating*

- *Overly compliant or demanding behaviour, extreme passivity, or aggression.*
- *Extremes in behaviour, such as being either inappropriately adult (parenting other children, for example) or inappropriately infantile (frequently rocking or head-banging, for example).*
- *Delayed in physical or emotional development.*
- *Has attempted suicide.*
- *Reports a lack of attachment to the parent.*

Consider the possibility of emotional abuse when the **parent or other adult caregiver**: Constantly blames, belittles, or berates the child.

- *Is unconcerned about the child and refuses to consider offers of help for the child's problems.*
- *Overtly rejects the child.*

3. Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse involves forcing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, whether or not the child is aware of, or consents to, what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including penetrative acts such as rape, oral sex or non-penetrative acts such as fondling. Sexual abuse may include non- contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of pornographic material or watching sexual activities, or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways. Boys and girls can be sexually abused by males and/or females, by adults and by other young people. This includes people from all walks of life.

Possible signs of abuse:

- *Inappropriate interest in or knowledge of sexual acts.*
- *Avoidance of things related to sexuality, or rejection of own genitals or body.*
- *Either over compliance or excessive aggression.*
- *Fear of a particular person or family member.*
- *Difficulty walking or sitting.*
- *Suddenly refuses to participate in physical activities.*

Consider the possibility of sexual abuse when the **parent or other adult caregiver**:

- *Is unduly protective of the child or severely limits the child's contact with other children, especially of the opposite sex.*
- *Is secretive and isolated.*
- *Is jealous or controlling with family members.*

4. Neglect

Neglect is 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 and development. It may involve a parent or carer failing to provide adequate food, shelter or clothing, failing to protect a child from physical harm or danger, or the failure to ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment. It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs.

Possible signs of abuse:

- *Clothing unsuited to the weather.*
- *Child dirty or unbathed.*
- *Extreme hunger.*
- *Apparent lack of supervision.*
- *Has not received help for physical or medical problems brought to the parents' attention.*
- *Has learning problems (or difficulty concentrating) that cannot be attributed to specific physical or psychological causes.*
- *Is always watchful, as though preparing for something bad to happen.*
- *Lacks adult supervision.*
- *Is overly compliant, passive, or withdrawn.*
- *Comes to activities early, stays late, and does not want to go home.*
- *Is frequently absent from school.*
- *Begs or steals food or money.*
- *Lacks needed medical or dental care, immunizations, or glasses.*
- *States that there is no one at home to provide care.*

Consider the possibility of neglect when the **parent or other adult caregiver**:

- *and child rarely touch or look at each other.*
- *Shows little concern for the child.*
- *Denies the existence of—or blames the child for—the child's problems in school or at home.*
- *Asks teachers or other caretakers to use harsh physical discipline if the child misbehaves.*
- *Sees the child as entirely bad, worthless, or burdensome.*
- *Demands a level of physical or academic performance the child cannot achieve.*
- *Looks primarily to the child for care, attention, and satisfaction of emotional needs.*

5. Peer on Peer (Child on Child) abuse

In most instances, the conduct of children towards each other will be covered by our Behavour Policy. However, some alligations may be of such a serious nature that they may raise safeguarding concerns.

The forms of peer on peer abuse are:

- *Bullying (including cyberbullying, prejudice-based and discriminatory bullying).*
- *Physical abuse which can include hitting, kicking, shaking, biting, hair pulling or otherwise causing physical harm.*
- *Abuse in intimate personal relationships between peers.*
- *Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment.*
- *Causing someone to engage in sexual activity without consent.*
- *Consensual or non-consensual sharing of nudes and semi-nude images and/or videos.*
- *Upskirting.*
- *Initiation/hazing type violence and rituals.*

Any downplaying of certain conduct can lead to a culture of unacceptable behaviour which will lead to children not reporting or normalising abuse causing an unsafe environment. We are clear that there will be a zero-tolerance approach to any form of peer on peer abuse.

Appendix 2

Radicalisation and Extremism

Some children are at risk of being radicalised; adopting beliefs and engaging in activities which are harmful, criminal or dangerous. This can happen both online and offline.

Explotation of vunerable children and radicalisation should be viewed as a safeguarding concern and Polka follows the Department for Education guidance for schools and childcare providers.

Polka seeks to protect children and young people against the messages of all violent extremism and when any menber of staff has concerns that a child or young person may be at rosk of radicalisation or involvement in terrorism, they should speak with the DSL in the first instance.

Extremism is defined by the Crown Prosecution Service as:

- The demonstration of unacceptable behaviour by using any means or medium to express views which:
- Encourage, justify or glorify terrorist violence in furtherance of beliefs.
- Seek to provoke others to terrorist acts.
- Encourage other serious criminal activity or seek to provoke others to serious criminal acts; or
- Foster hatred which might lead to inter-community violence in the UK.

Possible indicators of vulnerability to radicalisation

- *is distanced from their cultural/religious heritage*
- *experiencing family tensions; a sense of isolation; and low self-esteem.*
- *dissociated from their existing friendship group and become involved with a new and different group of friends.*
- *searching for answers to questions about identity, faith and belonging*
- *perceptions of injustice or feeling of failure*
- *involvement with criminal groups*

Appendix 3

Photography and Filming Consent Form

Activity:

In accordance with our Child Safety Protection Policy, Polka does not permit photographs, video or other images of young people to be taken without consent. If the child is under 18, consent must be obtained from a parent/carer.

Polka takes all necessary steps to ensure images and film footage are used solely for the purposes for which they are intended. If you become aware that any images are being used inappropriately, please inform us immediately.

Polka uses photographs and video in our marketing and fundraising activities; we also share images with our partners and funders. Polka aims to use images of children taken **in the past five years**. Occasionally, we may use older images, for example if we revive an old production, create an exhibition or archive our history as the UK's first dedicated children's theatre.

Please complete the consent form below using CAPITAL LETTERS.

Child's Name		**Age**	

Declaration of consent – parent / carer of child under 16			
Please tick each box (or strike out what you do not consent to) and sign this form.			
☐	I consent to photographs and video of my child being shared by Polka to help promote Polka's work e.g. in printed materials, on Polka's website and in applications for funding.		
☐	I consent to photographs and video of my child being shared with carefully chosen third parties eg your image may be used by Arts Council England or another Polka funder.		
Signature		**Today's date**	
Print name			

Polka's Child Protection Policy can be found at https://polkatheatre.com/child-protection-policy/. Polka's privacy policy can be found at Polka Privacy Policy (polkatheatre.com) or you can contact us at creativelearning@polkatheatre.com / 020 8545 8320. **Thank you.**

For more information, please visit http://polkatheatre.com/privacy-policy/ or contact us on creativelearning@polkatheatre.com / 020 8545 8320 **Thank you.**

Appendix 4

Child Protection Incident Record Form

POLKA THEATRE
Your Name:
Your Position:
Child's Name:
Child's Address:
Parents'/Carers' Name and Address:
Child's Date of Birth:
Date and Time of any Incident:
Nature of Incident/Your Observations:
Exactly What the Child Said and What You Said **(Record actual details. Continue on separate sheet if necessary)**
Action Taken so far

External Agencies Contacted (Date & Time)	
POLICE **Yes/No**	**If yes – which:** **Name and Contact Number:** **Details of Advice Received:**
Merton Children and Families Hub **Yes/No**	**If yes – which:** **Name and Contact Number :** **Details of Advice Received:**
Merton Local Authority Yes/No	**If yes – which:** **Name and Contact Number:** **Details of Advice Received:**
Other (e.g. NSPCC)	**Which:** **Name and Contact Number:** **Details of Advice Received:**
Signature: **Print Name:**	
Date:	

Signed_____

Polly Simmonds, Director of Creative Learning (Designated Safeguarding Lead)

Signed_____

Michael Bradley, Trustee Lead for Safeguarding, Polka Theatre

Appendix 5

Safeguarding Concern Form

Your Name:
Your Position:
Child's Name:
Child's Address:
Parents'/Carers' Name and Address:
Child's Date of Birth:
Date and Time of any Incident:
Nature of Incident/Your Observations:
Exactly What the Child Said and What You Said **(Record actual details. Continue on separate sheet if necessary)**
Action Taken so far
Signature: **Print Name:**
Date:
Agreed Follow Up:

Signed_____
Polly Simmonds, Director of Creative Learning (Designated Safeguarding Lead)

Appendix 6

Anti-Bullying Report Sheet

Date of incident:_____

Name of person reporting incident: _____

Time:_____

Location: _____

Description of incident (continue on a separate sheet if necessary)

_____

_____

_____

_____

Action taken: (continue on a separate sheet if necessary)

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Signature of person making report:

_____

Signature DSL:

_____

Appendix 7

Safe Touch Guidelines

Safe Touch needs to be:

- Necessary: are you sure that demonstration or verbal instruction is not adequate?
- Permitted: permission for contact sought and given by child or young person. Ask if you can touch and accept that permission may be refused
- Clear: tell the child or young person where you are going to touch and how you will touch
- Contextual: explain why you are going to touch
- Always check that your reason for using touch is understood and has been effective way of learning for the participant