**The Mitre Players’ Child Protection Policy Statement**

Good Practice Guidelines at the Mitre Players

This policy is designed to protect both young people and adults who are involved in any capacity with children whilst carrying out activities with the MITRE PLAYERS. The guidelines are displayed on the notice board at the TSSSC clubhouse where rehearsals take place and are available for all to read.

* The ­­­­­­­­Mitre Players aims to create an enjoyable environment for all children who audition and take part in productions.
* The young people have the right to be safe, secure and free from threat.
* The young people have the right to be treated with respect and for their concerns to be listened to and acted upon.
* Volunteers working with young people are aware of and apply the Code of Conduct for those Working with Children.
* During rehearsals children will be supervised at all times either by their parents or at least 2 adults. If ever there is a need for a one-to-one rehearsal, a parent or chaperone must also be present in the rehearsal room.
* During rehearsals in the theatre children will be supervised at all times either by their parents or a registered chaperone. Children will never be left unaccompanied in the presence of other adults.
* During Dress Rehearsals and Performances children will be allocated a partitioned area to change in. Boys and girls will change separately.
* A registered chaperone will not look after more than 12 children at a time and will release children at the end of the rehearsal or performance to their parents, guardian or named responsible adult only
* The Mitre Players has a registered chaperone who is specifically responsible for young people during each production.

This person’s name for Little Shop of Horrors is Louise Gauntlett, the contact telephone number is 07962 078368

In the event of an allegation or improper behaviour being made, the personal conduct and professional behaviour of the adult will be very important evidence. For child abuse to take place, particularly sexual abuse, the child and the adult(s) will generally be alone and away from public view. Thus the best defence is to avoid all situations in which behaviour cannot be observed.

**The Code of Conduct for all those Working with Children**

It is important for all adults to understand their responsibilities with children, and specific advice is given concerning the behaviour of all adults in the company.

Those working with children should:

1. be professional and maintain the highest standards of behavior at all times
2. be aware of situations which can be misconstrued and manipulated by others. For example, if an adult is alone with a child in the rehearsal hall, dressing rooms or theatre they are open to the possibility of allegations about their behavior
3. be vigilant and aware of how actions can be misinterpreted. For example, adolescents can have strong emotional feelings towards adults. Whilst these should not be dismissed and the youngster hurt as a result, neither should they be encouraged in any way
4. not appear to favour or show interest in one child more than another
5. be very aware that physically handling a child can be misconstrued by an observer or even by the child
6. never swear or use or respond to sexual innuendo (in person or on social media)
7. ensure that, as far as possible, they are not alone when working with children on an individual basis. If this is unavoidable then the parents should be made aware of the situation for the sake of the adult. The presence of others is an insurance against false accusations
8. conduct all dealings with children in a public environment in full view of others, in order that all behaviour can be observed
9. report any concerns within the area of Child Protection (physical, emotional, sexual or neglect), in confidence and without delay, to the Chaperone who can give advice and recommend any necessary action
10. not, at any time, discuss an allegation or suspicion with another person, other than the police, before either the above person or a responsible person has been contacted
11. when reporting an allegation or suspicion, record information, including relevant details. (This includes the nature of the allegation, background information of the parties involved, the period of time to which the allegation relates and the degree to which the information is known to be fact rather than opinion or hearsay)
12. at no time make comment to the media relating to any allegation involving a child

What is Child Abuse?

The Children Act 1989 defines children as those under the age of 18 and is concerned with the protection of children from any form of abuse. Abuse is illegal. In our culture it is unacceptable and many adults find their reactions to knowledge of it very strong. Many probably only think of sexual abuse as abuse, but in fact there are four recognized forms of child abuse – physical, emotional, neglect and sexual.

**Physical abuse** has occurred when the child suffers some form of physical injury which is not the result of an accident. An example of this could be recurrent bruising and on parts of the body where accidental injury would be unlikely. The injury could be bone breaks, burns or scalds. It would be difficult for the child to explain and may not have been treated. Some signs of physical abuse may be visible, but injuries may be covered by clothing. They may only be noticed, for example, if the child removes clothing during exercise. Conversely, concern may arise from the reluctance of a youngster to remove clothing when warm.

**Emotional abuse** is the result of a child receiving little affection, but could also arise when the child is continually made to feel inadequate by remarks made by parents or other adults. It may be difficult to recognize unless the child is known over a period of time. Emotional abuse may be characterized by a change in behaviour which may be abrupt or gradual and eventually by an inability to grow and thrive. Speech may be affected and the child may develop nervous behaviour.

**Neglect** can be indicated by a child failing to attain the development expected for the age. Neglect is long term and so it is important to notice both physical and behavioural signs. If a child is badly cared for, they may lack friends because of their appearance and they may arrive late, with no sign of parental or adult support.

**Sexual abuse** occurs when a child is involved in sexual behaviour against their will and with adults who are using their relationship with the child for their own sexual preferences. These preferences may be physical interference of a sexual nature – it is important to realise that any sexual interference which involves contact with the child is abuse, if unwanted. However, sexual abuse may take the form of involving the young person in pornographic material such as magazines or videos. Children often feel responsible and ashamed and may find it difficult to reveal what has happened to them, because they are embarrassed or worried about the outcome. As a result, in many instances the information is not given until months or years later. The indicators of sexual abuse may be physical in terms of pain and discomfort and/or behavioural. The child may seem very sexually aware for the age or be afraid of a particular adult.

In outside clubs many of the patterns for abuse, particularly sexual abuse, are different from those which occur within the family or an institution. There is increasing evidence that the abuser is often a trusted and influential person in an organisation who abuses that position of trust to work alone with children. It is also known that abusers gravitate to situations where little checking takes place. Many abusers are never brought to justice for a great variety of reasons. Finally, abusers are frequently repeat offenders.