

**CHAPERONES FOR CHILDREN IN ENTERTAINMENT**

Under the Children and Young Person’s Act 1933, the Children and Young Persons act 1963 and the Children (Performance and Activities) (England) Regulations 2014 children who require a licence to take part in a performance must be supervised by a parent or approved Chaperone. In the Regulations a Chaperone is referred to as ‘Matron’ and as she, however a Chaperone may be of any sex; similarly, a child is referred to as ‘he’. For the purposes of this document the term Chaperone will be used.

It is a legal requirement that whenever children of compulsory school age are engaged in public performance or entertainment under a licence issued by the local authority, they must be supervised at all times by a registered chaperone, unless they are under the direct supervision of either their parent or an agreed tutor.

Chaperones hold a key role in ensuring that the experience a child gains whilst engaged in such performances or entertainment is one that they enjoy and find beneficial.

A chaperone’s first duty is to look after the children in their care and they must not undertake any activity that would interfere with the performance of these duties. A chaperone is in loco parentis and is required to exercise the care which a good parent might reasonably be expected to give a child.

The Children and Young Persons Act prescribes how the health and safety needs of child performers are met through the regulation of the number of hours they rehearse and perform, the activities they can and cannot undertake and the standard of facilities and conditions in which they may work.

Chaperones have the responsibility of care for children in entertainment and the nature of a chaperone’s role is that they are in a position of trust regarding those children. Abuse of a position of trust in respect of young persons under the age of 18 is considered an offence under the Sexual Offences Act 2003 and would include sexual activity with or in the presence of a child, causing or inciting a child to engage in sexual activity or watch a sexual act.

It is essential that chaperones are properly advised and understand their duties and responsibilities due to the varying nature of their role.

All residents within the Wiltshire Council area who wish to act as a Chaperone for a performance for which a Child Performance Licence is required, either in a professional or voluntary capacity, must be approved by Wiltshire Council. The process will include an Enhanced DBS check, an Interview, Chaperone Training through Wiltshire Council and two references. It is essential that referees are able to comment on the suitability of an applicant to undertake the role of Chaperone and their experience of working with children.

The law says that the maximum number of children an individual Chaperone may supervise is twelve. However, the Local Authority may consider that due to the demands of the performance, the ages, gender of the children, or a combination of both, that the Chaperone would only be able to effectively supervise a smaller number. For example, boys and girls aged 5 years and over must be in separate changing rooms and therefore there would have to be at least two Chaperones on duty as the regulations state Chaperones must remain with the children at all times. This includes the dressing/changing room. It is only when the children are on stage or performing that Chaperones are not required to be by their side.

Legislation relating to children in entertainment is complex, therefore the Chaperones must have a clear understanding as to the exact requirements of the legislation for the age of the child. The regulations are designed wholly to protect the child’s welfare and to prevent a child being exploited. Chaperones must familiarise themselves with these restrictions, especially where they have specific relevance to their role.

A Chaperone should possess a variety of skills that will enable them to carry out their duty to the children in their care. These include:

* Firm negotiating skills as there may be occasions where a producer will want a child to continue working beyond the hours allowed or to work in conditions that are not suitable. It is essential that the chaperone is strong enough to advise this person that the performance cannot be allowed to continue; chaperones have the power to withdraw a child from a performance if they have good reason and should have the confidence to do so when it is in the interest of the child. Disputes can normally be resolved but this depends on the chaperone’s knowledge of the legislation and their interpersonal skills in dealing with such situations. Additionally, chaperones must be willing and able to challenge, when necessary, other duties at the place of performance whose behavior and language are inappropriate.
* Good communication skills. Performing should be an enjoyable experience for the children. Chaperones need to be able to communicate effectively with the children and a variety of adults involved with the production to ensure that this is the case.

Chaperones should have good organisational skills. They are required to keep detailed daily records of the children at the place of performance and these records must be available for examination on request. They must know where all the children in their care are and what they are doing at all times. During rest periods Chaperones must ensure that children are occupied, happy resting appropriately.

* The ability to tell when a child is ill, tired or upset. Children can find it difficult to express their feelings in a way that adults can understand. A chaperone must be able to interpret a child’s behaviour and act as an intermediary between the child and the production company.
* The ability to be able to explain to a child what is expected of him in a way that he understands taking into account his age and experience.
* An awareness of the health and safety issues on stage or on set. The equipment involved in a production can be very dangerous and the chaperone must ensure that procedures are in place to ensure the safety and well being of the children at all times.
* The skills to be able to occupy a child appropriately during the times that they are not performing, and they must take account that the concentration span of children is shorter than adults and varies with the age of the child.
* An awareness of what is happening around them and the child. As the child is an adult environment they may be exposed to adult conversation, expectations and peer pressure. A chaperone must take appropriate action to ensure the physical and mental wellbeing of the children in their care.
* An awareness of bullying issues. Bullying can be very subtle and is not necessarily physical; it can be defined as any behaviour by an individual or group, usually repeated over time, that intentionally hurts another individual or group either physically or emotionally. All bullying is unacceptable and action should be taken to prevent it happening.
* A basic understanding of emergency first aid treatment and acquaint themselves with the names of the appointed first aiders and their whereabouts, as well as the whereabouts of the first aid equipment.

This list is not exhaustive, different skills will be required when chaperoning in a theatre to those required on set or on location. A chaperone needs to take into account the setting in which the child is working, the amount of time a child spends waiting to perform, the time of day, any effect the weather may have (for example spending long periods of time indoors if it is raining) and the fact that children’s energy levels differ and they may need individual attention.

Chaperones must familiarise themselves with the place of performance, procedures for evacuating the building in case of fire and the escape routes from whatever rooms the children are using. Chaperones must have the ability to remain calm in an emergency and in stressful situations.

The Local Authority has the power to enter any premises where a performance is taking place, without prior notice, to establish that any children are being properly supervised and cared for. They have the power to withdraw the children from the performance or to withdraw the Chaperone’s registration or both.