



Registered Charity No. 1075263

MILTON KEYNES YOUTH CHOIR SAFEGUARDING POLICY

1. INTRODUCTION

Milton Keynes Youth Choir ("MKYC") believes that the safety and welfare of children is paramount. MKYC will do their best to ensure that:

- All children whatever their age, culture, disability, gender, language, racial origin, religious beliefs and/ or sexual identity will be protected from harm whilst in their care.
- All suspicions and allegations of abuse will be taken seriously and responded to swiftly and appropriately.
- All staff (paid or unpaid) working in the organisation will report concerns to the MKYC Safeguarding Officer (see below).

The Children Act 1989 defines a child as anyone who has not reached their 18th birthday. The fact that a child has reached 16 years of age, is living independently or is in further education, is a member of the armed forces, is in hospital, in prison or in a Young Offenders' Institution does not change his or her status or entitlement to services or protection.

2. POLICY AIMS

The aim of the MKYC Safeguarding Policy is to promote good practice with a view to:

- providing children and young people with appropriate safety and protection whilst in the care of MKYC; and
- allowing all staff /volunteers to make informed and confident responses to specific safeguarding issues.

3. SAFEGUARDING OFFICER

Each year at the MKYC Annual General Meeting, a Safeguarding Officer will be appointed (or re-appointed). The officer will be a member of the MKYC Committee and will hold an enhanced DBS certificate.

4. PROMOTING GOOD PRACTICE

Child abuse, particularly sexual abuse, can arouse strong emotions in those facing such a situation. It is important to understand these feelings and not allow them to interfere with your judgement about the appropriate action to take.

Abuse can occur within many situations including the home, school and leisure environment. Some individuals will actively seek employment or voluntary work with young people in order to harm them. A singing coach, instrumentalist, teacher, official or volunteer will have regular contact with young people and be an important link in identifying cases where they need protection. All suspicious cases of poor practice should be reported following the guidelines in this document.

When a child enters the choir having been subjected to child abuse outside the musical environment, singing can play a crucial role in improving the child's self-esteem. In such instances, the choir organiser must work with the appropriate agencies to ensure the child receives the required support.

All personnel should be encouraged to demonstrate exemplary behaviour in order to promote children's welfare and reduce the likelihood of allegations being made. The following are common sense examples of how to create a positive culture and climate.

4.1 Good practice means:

- Always working in an open environment (eg avoiding private or unobserved situations and encouraging open communication with no secrets).
- Treating all young people equally, and with respect and dignity.
- Always putting the welfare of each young person first, before winning or achieving goals.
- Maintaining a safe and appropriate distance from members of the choirs (e.g. it is not appropriate for staff or volunteers to have an intimate relationship with a child or to share a room with them).
- Building balanced relationships based on mutual trust which empowers children to share in the decision-making process.
- Making singing fun, enjoyable and promoting fair play.
- Ensuring that if any form of manual/physical support is required (eg to demonstrate correct posture) it should be provided openly. Young people and their parents should always be consulted and their agreement gained.
- Keeping up to date with technical skills and qualifications.
- Involving parents/carers wherever possible. For example, encouraging them to take responsibility for their children in toilets and changing rooms. If groups have to be supervised, always ensure parents, members of staff or officials work in pairs.
- Ensuring that if a mixed gender choir is taken away, it should always be accompanied by a male and female member of staff or official. However, remember that same gender abuse can also occur.
- Ensuring that at residential events (eg a concert tour) adults should not enter children's rooms or invite children into their rooms.
- Being an excellent role model - this includes not smoking or drinking excessive alcohol in the company of young people.
- Giving enthusiastic and constructive feedback rather than negative criticism.
- Recognising the developmental needs and capacity of young people and disabled adults.
- Avoiding excessive rehearsal or competition and not pushing them against their will.
- Securing parental consent in writing to act *in loco parentis* if the need arises to administer emergency first aid and/or other medical treatment.
- Keeping a written record of any illness or injury that occurs during choir activities, along with the details of any treatment given.
- Requesting written parental consent if staff or volunteers are required to transport young people in their cars.

4.2 Practices to be avoided

The following practices should be **avoided** except in emergencies. For example, a child might sustain an injury and needs to go to hospital, or a parent might fail to arrive to pick a child up at the end of a session. If cases arise where these situations are unavoidable it should be with the full knowledge and consent of a committee member or the child's parents.

- avoid spending time alone with children away from others
- avoid taking or dropping off a child to an event or activity.

4.3 Practices never to be sanctioned

The following practices should **never** be sanctioned. You should never:

- engage in rough, physical or sexually provocative games, including horseplay
- share a room with a child
- allow or engage in any form of inappropriate touching
- allow children to use inappropriate language unchallenged
- make sexually suggestive comments to a child, even in fun
- reduce a child to tears as a form of control
- fail to act upon and record any allegations made by a child
- do things of a personal nature for children or disabled adults, that they can do for themselves
- invite or allow children to stay with you at your home unsupervised.

N.B. It may sometimes be necessary for staff or volunteers to do things of a personal nature for children, particularly if they are young or are disabled. These tasks should only be carried out with the full understanding and consent of parents and the choir members involved. There is a need to be responsive to a person's reactions. If a person is fully dependent on you, talk with him/her about what you are doing and give choices where possible. This is particularly so if you are involved in any dressing or undressing of outer clothing, or where there is physical contact, lifting or assisting a child to carry out particular activities. Avoid taking on the responsibility for tasks for which you are not appropriately trained.

4.4 Incidents that must be reported/recorded

If any of the following occur you should report this immediately to the Safeguarding officer and record the incident. You should also ensure the parents of the child are informed:

- if you accidentally hurt a child
- if he/she seems distressed in any manner
- if a choir member appears to be sexually aroused by your actions
- if a choir member misunderstands or misinterprets something you have done.

4.5 Use of photographic/filming equipment at choir events

It is possible that some people could use choral events as an opportunity to take inappropriate photographs or film footage of young and disabled people. It is likely that MKYC and/or parents will wish to take photographs or film footage on these occasions., MKYC will be vigilant at all times and any concerns should be reported to the MKYC Safeguarding Officer.

5. RESPONDING TO ALLEGATIONS OR SUSPICIONS

It is not the responsibility of anyone working in MKYC in a paid or unpaid capacity to decide whether or not child abuse has taken place. However, there is a responsibility to act on any concerns by reporting these to the appropriate officer or the appropriate authorities.

MKYC will assure all staff/volunteers will fully support and protect anyone, who in good faith, reports his or her concern that a colleague is, or may be, abusing a child.

Where there is a complaint against a member of staff/volunteer or member of the committee there may be three types of investigation:

- a criminal investigation
- a child protection investigation
- a disciplinary or misconduct investigation.

The results of the police and child protection investigation may well influence and inform the disciplinary investigation, but all available information will be used to reach a decision.

5.1 Action if there are concerns

(i) Concerns about poor practice:

- If, following consideration, the allegation is clearly about poor practice, the Safeguarding Officer will deal with it as a misconduct issue.
- If the allegation is about poor practice by the Safeguarding Officer, or if the matter has been handled inadequately and concerns remain, it should be reported to the MKYC Committee who will decide how to deal with the allegation and whether or not to initiate disciplinary proceedings.

(ii) Concerns about suspected abuse:

- Any suspicion that a child has been abused by either a member of staff or a volunteer should be reported to the Safeguarding Officer, who will take such steps as considered necessary to ensure the safety of the child in question and any other child who may be at risk.
- The Safeguarding Officer will refer the allegation to the Milton Keynes Safeguarding Children Board (MKSCB) who may involve the police. Their telephone number is 01908 253169 or 253170.
- The parents or carers of the child will be contacted as soon as possible following advice from MKSCB.
- If the Safeguarding Officer is the subject of the suspicion/allegation, the report must be made to a member of the MKYC Committee who will refer the allegation to MKSCB.

5.2 Information for social services or the police about suspected abuse

To ensure that this information is as helpful as possible, a detailed record should always be made at the time of the disclosure/concern, which should include the following:

- The child's name, age and date of birth of the child.
- The child's home address and telephone number.
- Whether or not the person making the report is expressing their own concerns or those of someone else.
- The nature of the allegation. Include dates, times, any special factors and other relevant information.
- Make a clear distinction between what is fact, opinion or hearsay.
- A description of any visible bruising or other injuries. Also any indirect signs, such as behavioural changes.
- Details of witnesses to the incidents.
- The child's account, if it can be given, of what has happened and how any bruising or other injuries occurred.
- Have the parents been contacted? If so what has been said?
- Has anyone else been consulted? If so record details.

5.3 Confidentiality

Every effort should be made to ensure that confidentiality is maintained for all concerned. Information should be handled and disseminated on a "need to know" basis only. This includes the following people:

- the Safeguarding Officer
- the parents of the person who is alleged to have been abused
- the person making the allegation
- social services/police

Information should be stored in a secure place with limited access to designated people, in line with data protection laws (e.g. that information is accurate, regularly updated, relevant and secure).

5.4 Internal enquiries and suspension

- The Safeguarding Officer will make an immediate decision about whether any individual accused of abuse should be temporarily suspended pending further social services and police inquiries.
- Irrespective of the findings of the social services or police inquiries the MKYC Committee will assess all individual cases to decide whether a member of staff or volunteer can be reinstated and how this can be handled sensitively. This may be a difficult decision, particularly where there is insufficient evidence to uphold any action by the police. In such cases, the MKYC Committee must reach a decision based upon the available information which could suggest that on a balance of probability, it is more likely than not that the allegation is true. The welfare of the child should remain of paramount importance throughout.

6. SUPPORT TO DEAL WITH THE AFTERMATH OF ABUSE

Consideration should be given to the kind of support that children, parents and members of staff may need. Use of helplines, support groups and open meetings will maintain an open culture and help the healing process. The British Association for Counselling Directory is available from The British Association for Counselling, 1 Regent Place, Rugby CV21 2PJ, Tel: 01788 550899, Fax: 01788 562189, E-mail: bac@bacp.co.uk, Internet:

www.bacp.co.uk . Consideration should also be given to what kind of support may be appropriate for the alleged perpetrator.

7. ALLEGATIONS OF PREVIOUS ABUSE

Allegations of abuse may be made some time after the event (e.g. by an adult who was abused as a child or by a member of staff who is still currently working with children). Where such an allegation is made, MKYC will follow the procedures as detailed above and report the matter to the social services or the police. This is because other children, either within or outside the musical environment, may be at risk from this person. Anyone who has a previous criminal conviction for offences related to abuse is automatically excluded from working with children. This is reinforced by the details of the Protection of Children Act 1999.

8. BULLYING

Whilst bullying is most commonly associated with the school setting, it can take place in any setting and MKYC will be vigilant for any signs.

8.1 Action if bullying is suspected

If bullying is suspected, the same procedure should be followed as set out in 'Responding to suspicions or allegations' above.

The following action should be taken to help the victim and prevent bullying:

- Take all signs of bullying very seriously.
- Encourage all children to speak and share their concerns (it is believed that up to 12 children per year commit suicide as a result of bullying, so if anyone talks about or threatens suicide, seek professional help immediately). Help the victim to speak out and tell the person in charge or someone in authority. Create an open environment.
- Investigate all allegations and take action to ensure the victim is safe. Speak with the victim and the bully(ies) separately.
- Reassure the victim that you can be trusted and will help them, although you cannot promise to tell no one else.
- Keep clear records of what is said (what happened, by whom, when).
- Report any concerns to the Safeguarding Officer or the Headteacher of the child's school (or wherever else the bullying is occurring).

8.2 Action towards the bully(ies)

- Talk with the bully(ies), explain the situation, and try to get the bully(ies) to understand the consequences of their behaviour. Seek an apology to the victim(s).
- Inform the bully's parents.
- Insist on the return of 'borrowed' items and that the bully(ies) compensate the victim.
- Impose sanctions as necessary.
- Encourage and support the bully(ies) to change behaviour.
- Hold meetings with the families to report on progress.
- Inform the MKYC Committee of action taken.
- Keep a written record of action taken.
- Most 'low level' incidents will be dealt with by the music staff leading the rehearsal or performance. However, if the bullying is severe (e.g. a serious assault), or if it persists despite efforts to deal with it, incidents should be referred to the Safeguarding Officer as in "responding to suspicions or allegations" above.
- If the child was not the person who reported the incident, has the child been spoken to? If so what was said?
- Has anyone been alleged to be the abuser? Record details.
- Where possible referral to the police or social services should be confirmed in writing within 24 hours and the name of the contact who took the referral should be recorded.

9. RECRUITMENT OF STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

MKYC recognises that anyone may have the potential to abuse children in some way and that all reasonable steps should be taken to ensure that unsuitable people are prevented from working with children. Pre-selection checks must include the following:

- All applicants, for paid posts, should complete an application form or submit a detailed CV. The application form will elicit information about an applicant's past and a self-disclosure about any criminal record.
- If an applicant does not already hold an enhanced DBS certificate, then MKYC will initiate the process of gaining one through an umbrella body. Once the applicant has their certificate, this should be presented to MKYC for checking. These will be checked annually.
- Two confidential references should be requested, including one regarding previous work with children. These references must be taken up and confirmed through telephone contact.
- Evidence of identity (passport or driving licence with photo)
- All officers of the choir (that is Chair, Secretary, Treasurer and Safeguarding Officer) must have enhanced DBS certificates. These will be checked annually.
- Other committee members and parents will be encouraged to apply for, and have checked, enhanced DBS certificates.

9.1 Interview and induction

All applicants will be required to undergo an interview carried out in accordance with accepted good practice and protocol.

- A check should be made that the application form has been completed in full (including sections on criminal records and self-disclosures).
- Their qualifications should be substantiated.
- The job requirements and responsibilities should be clarified.

Once appointed, all new employees and volunteers should receive an induction, during which:

- Safeguarding procedures are explained and training needs are identified.
- They should sign up to the organisation's Code of Conduct and Safeguarding Policy.

9.2 Training

In addition to pre-selection checks, the safeguarding process might include training after recruitment to help staff and volunteers to understand their responsibilities and deal with situations correctly.