

Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy



The Drama Guru makes a positive difference to the lives of young people and believes creativity is vital for a fulfilled life.

September 2026

Responsible Person / Safeguarding Lead	Matthew Whitelock
Policy effective from	September 2026
Next scheduled review	September 2027
Review earlier if	Legislation, statutory guidance, local safeguarding arrangements or The Drama Guru's working practices change

1. Statement of Intent

The Drama Guru is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of every child and young person who takes part in its classes, coaching, workshops, productions and other activities. The welfare, safety, dignity and voice of the child are central to all decisions.

We aim to provide a safe, supportive and inclusive environment in which young people can develop confidence, creativity, communication and performance skills. Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns can arise in person, online, inside or outside a Drama Guru session.

This policy has been updated with regard to Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) 2026, Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026, the Children Act 1989 and 2004, the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006 as amended, the Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR, and relevant provisions of the Crime and Policing Act 2026. KCSIE is statutory guidance for schools and colleges in England. Where The Drama Guru works within a school or college, its own procedures support and do not replace the host setting's safeguarding policy, Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) arrangements and reporting procedures.

2. Safeguarding Principles

- The welfare and best interests of the child come first.
- Safeguarding is child-centred: children should be listened to, taken seriously and given the right help at the right time.
- It could happen here. Staff and associates must remain professionally curious and must not assume someone else will act.
- All concerns, including concerns that appear small or low-level, should be shared through the appropriate safeguarding route.
- Children may face harm from adults, other children, family members, people in the community or people they meet online.
- Some children face additional barriers to recognising or reporting abuse, including children with SEND, communication needs, disabilities or previous experiences of trauma.
- Safeguarding practice must be inclusive and must challenge discrimination, racism, harassment, misogyny and other harmful behaviour.
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3. Roles and Responsibilities

Matthew Whitelock is The Drama Guru's Responsible Person / Safeguarding Lead. All Drama Guru staff, associate coaches and regular volunteers must understand this policy, know how to raise a concern and receive safeguarding information or training appropriate to their role.

Anyone working for The Drama Guru in a school or college must also know who the host setting's DSL or deputy DSL is and follow that setting's procedures. A concern arising in a school should normally be passed promptly to the school DSL as well as being recorded within The Drama Guru's own safeguarding arrangements where appropriate.

Staff and associates working regularly in schools are expected to read KCSIE 2026 Part One in full, in line with the safeguarding standard applied to school staff.

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4. What is Abuse and Harm?

Abuse is a form of maltreatment. A child may be harmed by an adult or another child, by inflicting harm or by failing to act to prevent harm. Harm can occur face-to-face or online and the different forms of abuse can overlap.

- Physical abuse – deliberately causing physical harm or injury.
- Emotional abuse – persistent emotional maltreatment that adversely affects a child's emotional development or wellbeing.
- Sexual abuse – forcing, enticing or involving a child in sexual activity, whether or not the child understands what is happening, including non-contact and online abuse.
- Neglect – persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs.
- Child sexual exploitation and child criminal exploitation – where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child into sexual or criminal activity.
- Child-on-child abuse – including bullying, physical abuse, sexual violence, sexual harassment, harmful sexual behaviour, abuse within intimate personal relationships, initiation/hazing and online abuse.
- Online harm – including cyberbullying, grooming, coercion, sexual harassment, harmful content, sharing of intimate images, and manipulated or AI-generated sexual or intimate images, including deepfakes.
- Domestic abuse and coercive control, honour-based abuse, female genital mutilation and forced marriage.
- Radicalisation or extremist influence where this creates a safeguarding concern.

5. Recognising Concerns

There is no single sign of abuse. Staff should pay attention to changes in a child's behaviour, presentation, relationships or communication and consider the wider context.

- Unexplained injuries or repeated physical complaints.
- Sudden changes in mood, confidence, behaviour or attendance.
- Withdrawal, fear, anxiety, distress or unusually sexualised behaviour or knowledge.
- Poor hygiene, hunger, persistent tiredness or unmet basic needs.
- A child appearing controlled, exploited, frightened of another person or unusually secretive.
- Changes linked to phones, gaming or social media, including distress after receiving messages or pressure to share images.
- Sexist, misogynistic, discriminatory or sexually harmful language or behaviour between children.

Signs do not prove abuse, but they must not be dismissed. Staff should record and share concerns rather than attempting to diagnose or investigate them.

6. Reporting Safeguarding Concerns

All safeguarding concerns must be reported without delay to Matthew Whitelock and, where the activity is taking place within a school or other host setting, to that setting's DSL or deputy DSL in accordance with its procedures. If a child is in immediate danger or at risk of serious immediate harm, contact the emergency services on 999. A referral to children's social care or the police must not be delayed because a DSL is unavailable.

A safeguarding record should include:

- A clear summary of the concern, including date, time and context.
- The child's own words where a disclosure has been made, as accurately as possible.
- Factual observations rather than assumptions or personal conclusions.
- What action was taken and by whom.
- Decisions made, the reasons for those decisions and the outcome where known.

Records must be made as soon as possible, stored securely and shared only with those who need the information for safeguarding purposes.

7. Responding to a Disclosure

- Stay calm, listen carefully and give the child time to speak.
- Take the child seriously and acknowledge that speaking up was the right thing to do.
- Do not promise secrecy or confidentiality. Explain that information may need to be shared to help keep them or another child safe.
- Do not investigate, interrogate or ask leading questions. Use only open questions where clarification is genuinely needed.
- Do not confront the alleged perpetrator.
- Record what was said promptly and report it through the safeguarding procedure.

Where a disclosure or other information concerns possible child sexual abuse, staff must act immediately through

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safeguarding procedures. The Crime and Policing Act 2026 creates a mandatory reporting duty for specified adults engaged in relevant activity, but the Government has stated that this duty is being implemented for commencement in 2027. This policy will be reviewed when the commencement date and operational guidance are in force. Existing safeguarding and referral duties apply in the meantime.

8. Early Help and Family Help

Children and families may need support before a concern reaches the threshold for statutory intervention. Staff should share emerging concerns with the appropriate DSL so that the child can receive the right support at the right time, including universal services, community-based early help or Family Help where appropriate. The Drama Guru will not attempt to provide specialist safeguarding or family support outside its competence. Its role is to notice, record, share and cooperate with the relevant professionals.

9. Child-on-Child Abuse

The Drama Guru operates a zero-tolerance approach to abuse between children. Behaviour must not be dismissed as ‘banter’, ‘part of growing up’ or harmless because children are involved. Concerns may include bullying, sexual harassment, sexual violence, harmful sexual behaviour, controlling or abusive relationships, discriminatory abuse, initiation or hazing, image sharing and online harassment. Both the child who may have been harmed and any child displaying harmful behaviour should be treated as children with safeguarding needs. Incidents will be reported to the appropriate DSL and managed in a way that protects children, avoids victim-blaming and takes account of the wishes and feelings of the child who has been harmed.

10. Online Safety, Social Media and Emerging Technology

Online life is part of young people’s everyday world. The Drama Guru’s approach is to help keep children safe within that world, not to ignore it. All online contact must remain professional, transparent and consistent with The Drama Guru Social Media Policy and the policies of any host school.

- Parents/carers will be informed where a Drama Guru social media arrangement involves their child.
- Staff must maintain professional boundaries and must not use online contact to create secret, inappropriate or exclusive relationships with children.
- Communication should be capable of being accounted for and, where appropriate, retained or reported.
- Images, video and personal information must only be used in line with consent, data protection requirements and The Drama Guru’s photography/social media arrangements.
- Staff must report concerning online content, grooming, threats, coercion, sexualised messages or image sharing.
- Particular care must be taken with disappearing-message features, livestreaming, location sharing, AI tools and manipulated or AI-generated intimate images.

Children should be encouraged to speak to a trusted adult if something online makes them uncomfortable, frightened, pressured or unsafe.

11. Allegations, Low-Level Concerns and Staff Conduct

Any safeguarding concern or allegation about a Drama Guru member of staff, associate, volunteer or other adult working with children must be taken seriously, including concerns that appear small or do not meet the threshold of an allegation.

Concerns about another adult must not be ignored or dealt with privately. They must be reported promptly to Matthew Whitelock. If the concern is about Matthew Whitelock, it should be reported directly to the relevant host school’s headteacher/DSL as appropriate and/or the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) or children’s social care for advice.

Where required, referrals or consultation may involve the LADO, children’s social care, police, Disclosure and Barring Service or relevant professional regulator. The child’s welfare takes priority over the reputation of any individual or organisation.

Staff must maintain appropriate boundaries, use professional judgement, avoid favouritism and ensure that physical contact, one-to-one work and communication are necessary, appropriate and transparent.

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12. Safer Recruitment, DBS and Regulated Activity

The Drama Guru uses safer recruitment and suitability checks appropriate to each role, including identity checks, relevant qualifications or experience, references where appropriate, safeguarding expectations and DBS checks at the level for which the role is legally eligible.

From 1 September 2026, the supervision exemption from the definition of regulated activity with children has been removed. A person who teaches, trains, instructs, cares for or supervises children frequently enough may therefore be in regulated activity even when supervised by another adult.

Roles will be assessed according to their actual duties and frequency. Where a role is regulated activity and eligible, The Drama Guru will obtain or verify an Enhanced DBS check with Children's Barred List information as appropriate. A barred person must never be permitted to undertake regulated activity with children.

DBS status is only one part of safer recruitment. Suitability, conduct, references, safeguarding awareness and ongoing supervision remain important.

13. Physical Contact and Intervention

Drama work can involve movement, demonstration and performance. Any physical contact must be appropriate to the activity, proportionate, non-secretive and guided by professional judgement. Wherever practical, the purpose of contact should be explained.

Physical intervention or restraint should only be used when lawful, necessary and proportionate to prevent immediate harm, and in accordance with the host setting's policy where applicable. Any significant intervention must be recorded and reported promptly.

14. One-to-One Work and Transport

One-to-one coaching should be planned and transparent, with appropriate safeguards such as parental/school knowledge, suitable spaces and visibility where possible. The needs of the individual child and the host setting's procedures must be considered.

Staff should avoid transporting a child alone in a private vehicle. If exceptional circumstances make this necessary, parental/setting knowledge and appropriate safeguards must be in place and the journey should be recorded.

15. Information Sharing, Confidentiality and Data Protection

Safeguarding information must be handled lawfully, securely and proportionately. Confidentiality is important, but it must never prevent necessary safeguarding action.

The Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR do not prevent the sharing of information for safeguarding purposes where there is a lawful basis. Staff should not allow fear about data protection to delay sharing information needed to protect a child.

Information should be shared with the right people, at the right time and only to the extent necessary. Where possible, children and families should be informed about information sharing unless doing so could place a child or another person at increased risk, prejudice an investigation or otherwise be inappropriate.

The Drama Guru will have regard to the Department for Education's statutory Information Sharing guidance. The new Information Sharing Duty under section 16LA of the Children Act 2004 comes into force on 30 September 2026 for organisations within its scope; The Drama Guru will cooperate with host schools and relevant safeguarding partners in accordance with applicable duties and requests.

16. Equality, Inclusion and Additional Vulnerability

All children have the same right to protection. Safeguarding practice will take account of disability, SEND, communication needs, race, sex, religion or belief, sexual orientation, gender reassignment and other protected characteristics, without making assumptions about a child.

Children with SEND or communication needs may experience additional safeguarding challenges, including behaviour being wrongly attributed to their needs or greater difficulty communicating concerns. Staff must remain alert to these barriers and make reasonable adjustments to help children communicate and participate safely.

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17. Bullying, Discrimination and Harmful Behaviour

Bullying, harassment and discriminatory behaviour are not tolerated. This includes physical, verbal, emotional and online bullying, racism, sexism, misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, ableism and other discriminatory conduct. Drama activities may explore difficult themes, but this never excuses harmful behaviour towards another participant. Staff should challenge inappropriate behaviour in a safe and proportionate way and report safeguarding concerns.

18. Whistleblowing

Anyone working with The Drama Guru must be able to raise concerns about unsafe practice, poor safeguarding or the conduct of another adult. Concerns will be taken seriously and must not be suppressed because they may be uncomfortable or damaging to an individual or organisation.

Where a person feels unable to raise a concern internally, or believes it has not been acted upon appropriately, they should use the safeguarding or whistleblowing route of the host organisation or seek advice from the relevant statutory safeguarding body.

19. Local Safeguarding and Emergency Contacts

For work in Reading, the current local safeguarding route should be checked at the time a referral is required, as local contact arrangements can change.

- Emergency services: 999 where a child is in immediate danger.
- Reading / Brighter Futures for Children: use the current Children's Single Point of Access / safeguarding referral route published by the local authority.
- Out-of-hours safeguarding: use the current Emergency Duty Service published by the local authority.
- For work outside Reading, use the children's social care and LADO arrangements for the local authority in which the child lives or the activity takes place, as appropriate.

The Drama Guru will not rely solely on contact numbers printed in this policy where there is any doubt that they remain current.

20. Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed at least annually and sooner where legislation, statutory guidance, local safeguarding arrangements or The Drama Guru's activities change.

A further review will be undertaken when the Crime and Policing Act 2026 mandatory reporting duty for child sexual abuse comes into force and the Government publishes final operational guidance for that duty.

Key Guidance and Legislation

- Department for Education: Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026, in force from 1 September 2026.
- Department for Education: Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026.
- Department for Education: Information Sharing to Safeguard Children and Young People, updated September 2026.
- Children Act 1989 and Children Act 2004.
- Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006, as amended.
- Data Protection Act 2018 and UK General Data Protection Regulation.
- Crime and Policing Act 2026.
- Disclosure and Barring Service / Department for Education guidance on regulated activity with children from 1 September 2026.

Contact Details

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