

Fact Sheet

Matrons/Chaperones

Please take the time to read the information provided, before completing the application form.

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 matron (referred to as a chaperone), unless they are under the direct supervision of either a parent or an agreed tutor.

It is clear that 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.

The Local Authority believes that this gives such children the opportunity to grow as individuals. It helps them gain confidence and promotes self-esteem whilst enabling them to appreciate the needs of others and develop 'team' skills.

This document has been devoted to examining the role of a chaperone and explaining how important we believe the role is to the individual and to the children under their supervision.

The difficulty we have experienced has been to demonstrate the vast contrast in type of performances a chaperone could be asked to supervise. Many chaperones first register with the Local Authority because their child is performing in the annual dancing school or amateur dramatic performance, with little or no intention to be involved in any other productions.

Whilst it is only right that these chaperones need to be properly advised on the requirements of their role, they also need to be aware that government only permits one standard of registration (licensed).

Registered (licensed) chaperones have the authority to supervise children at a local Amateur Dramatic performance, at a top West End show or indeed on a film set or on location on the other side of the world. It is, therefore, paramount that chaperones understand their role, the responsibility and obligation they have and how to use those powers effectively and for the benefit of the children in their care.

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 ages, gender of the children, or a combination of both, that the chaperone would only be able to supervise a smaller number.

For instance, if boys and girls were in separate changing rooms, which are essential as they move towards their teenage years, there would have to be at least 2 chaperones on duty. This is because the regulations state that chaperones must remain with the children all of the time. This includes the dressing/changing room.

It is only when they are on stage or performing that chaperones are not required to be by their side.

It is inevitable that chaperones may feel that they are in the way, and to some extent not giving the child(ren) sufficient freedom. However, the chaperone is the representative of the Local Authority and their sole concern must be to protect the health, safety, moral welfare and education, whilst ensuring the kind treatment, of each and every child in their care.

There are many restrictions in relation to when a child may work. These are set by government to protect the child's general welfare. Chaperones are expected to familiarise themselves with these restrictions, especially where they have specific relevance to their role.

It is not a matter of the Local Authority being pedantic or keeping to the letter of the law. The regulations are designed wholly to prevent a child being exploited by working too many hours during a given period of time, which will inevitably result in the child's general well being or education suffering in the long term. **A chaperone has the responsibility to ensure that this does not happen.**

There may well be occasions where a Producer will want a child to continue working beyond the hours allowed. It is vital that where this is the case the chaperone is strong enough to advise this person that the performance cannot be allowed to continue, However, because the legislation of children in entertainment is so complex, it is vital that if chaperones find themselves in this position, they must be clear as to the exact requirements of the legislation.

Disputes can normally be amicably resolved but may depend on the chaperone's knowledge and their interpersonal skills in dealing with such situations.

The Local Authority have the power to enter any premises where a performance or entertainment is being performed by children, without prior notice, to establish that the 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.

This is the last thing the Local Authority wish to do, hence the emphasis of this information in an attempt to bring to the chaperone the extent of their role and the responsibility they have to the children in their care. We hope that by working together it will make it unlikely that we should ever have to take this type of action. However, if we believe that the general welfare of the child may be affected, we will have no option but to enforce our statutory duties.