

GUIDANCE FOR PRODUCTIONS

Protecting Child Performers

What a clinical psychologist brings to a production

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Prevention, Not Just Protection

Most productions have legal and physical duty of care well covered: chaperones, licensed hours, vetted crew, a Child Protection Policy. What's missing is prevention at the psychological level: making sure a child is never actually exposed to the traumatic, adult storyline their character is depicting.

A child's stress-response system doesn't distinguish "acting" from "happening." If a child understands or is exposed to the real story, whether abuse, violence, addiction or grief, their body responds to it as real: genuine activation of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis, raised cortisol, a real stress response, whatever the script calls it.

THE CORE DISTINCTION

My work isn't to manage that exposure once it's happened. It's to prevent it in the first place.

THE METHOD

The Principle

The child performs from a story I often create for them: an alternative, age-appropriate version of the scene and dialogue, while the finished footage delivers the adult storyline the script requires.

Done well, the child's own cortisol never needs to rise in response to the real material, because they are never given the real material. Everyone around them on set is briefed on exactly what can, and cannot, be said in their hearing, so the protection holds throughout filming.

What It Protects

For the Child

- Never exposed to the actual traumatic storyline; works from their own child-friendly version of the scene.
- Distress is prevented, not managed after it's already occurred.
- Cast and crew are briefed on exactly what can and can't be said around them.
- Understanding and consent stay age-appropriate throughout.

For the Production

- An authentic, unflinching adult performance on screen, without exposing the child to the real story behind it.
- A documented, clinically-led process reduces legal and reputational exposure.
- Fewer wellbeing-driven delays, reshoots or on-set incidents.
- A clear "what can and can't be said" briefing removes guesswork on set.

The 15–18 Gap

Chaperone and licensing protections for young performers do not necessarily end when they turn 16. Instead, they end on the last Friday in June of the school year in which the performer is in Year 11, marking the official end of compulsory school age. Because a young person's birthday may fall later in the year, this means some performers can still be 15 when these protections end. As a result, a 15-year-old could legally work on set without a chaperone and without requiring a performance licence. Best practice would ask that this group is treated no differently by production in regard to chaperone and welfare support until they turn 18.

This is the age band that worries me most: distressing material, press exposure and post-transmission scrutiny land hardest here, with the least structure around them.

RECOMMENDATION

I recommend consultation with a child psychologist for any intimate scene near the age of majority, and extend that same principle to any scene asking a young performer to enact trauma, abuse or violence: a psychological load a chaperone or intimacy coordinator alone isn't positioned to assess.

A Three-Phase Framework

01

Pre-Filming

Psychological Evaluations

Pre-production screening of child and adult cast, identifying vulnerabilities and establishing a wellbeing baseline before filming begins.

Duty of Care Consultancy

Helping productions fulfil their legal and ethical duty of care obligations with bespoke support packages and policy review, including review of Child Protection Policies, crew conduct guidance, and specialist briefings.

Script & Risk Assessment

Review of scripts involving sensitive, traumatic or challenging content, with practical recommendations and child-friendly dialogue where needed.

02

During Filming

On-Set & Off-Set Support

Daily wellbeing assessment of cast and contributors during filming, crew briefings, and real-time guidance for directors and producers.

03

Post-Filming

Post-Production Aftercare

Supporting cast through the transition back to everyday life, managing the psychological impact of transmission and social media response.

“If you're planning a production involving child performers, or scenes carrying real emotional weight for any cast member, I'd be glad to talk through what this could look like for your specific script and schedule.”