

Responsibilities of a Chaperone

Your first responsibility is to the child in your care.

While you are chaperoning you should not be performing any other duties. Remember, you are in loco parentis (except when the child is in the care of a teacher).

It is your responsibility, together with the licence holder, to ensure that the regulations (and any additional requirements issued by the child's licensing authority) are upheld at all times. You may find yourself under pressure, by the production company from time to time, to relax the regulations due to re-scheduling but you must remember that your first duty is to the care of the child. Therefore, having a good knowledge of the regulations, knowing where to go for additional advice, coupled with firm negotiating skills, are crucial elements to good chaperoning.

You should be with the child at all times whether: on set/stage area, dressing rooms, recreation, meal and break areas etc. You are the key person to whom the child looks for protection, clarification and support. If you consider the available facilities to be unsatisfactory (dressing rooms, toilets etc.) you should negotiate better facilities with the producer. Children are not 'add-ons' to a production, their care is paramount at all times. You can obtain additional support from your licensing local authority, the child's licensing local authority or the local authority in whose area the performance is taking place.

Under Regulation 15(3) the maximum number of children a chaperone can look after at any one time is 12. However, this will depend on the type of production, age and needs of the children being cared for, layout of the venue/location as well as other factors.

Although a maximum length of time for travelling is not laid down in the regulations, due consideration should be given to the child's age, the length of time at the place of performance and the duration of the production. Therefore, taking into account the child's welfare, it may be more sensible for a production company to schedule each child's performance days in blocks per week or provide accommodation nearer to where the performance is taking place rather than travelling several hours each day and attending school in between. Remember, schedules can be amended if they are not working satisfactorily.

Illness or injury

At no time should a child perform when unwell. If a child falls ill or is injured while in the chaperones or tutors charge medical assistance must be gained and the parent/guardian and the licensing local authority informed immediately. Always have a contact number for parents.

Living away from home

The chaperone is responsible for the child and should accompany him/her at all times. This responsibility includes seeing that his/her lodgings are satisfactory in every way; and that she/he is properly occupied during his/her spare time and that there are suitable arrangements for meals, food should normally be provided at the lodgings. The chaperone must arrange to sleep in the accommodation in which the children sleep near to the rooms occupied by the children.

Generally, you may need to exercise a greater amount of supervision than if the child was living at home. Again, if there are problems here, which cannot be resolved, contact the child's

licensing local authority or the local authority in whose area the performance is taking place.

Dangerous Performances

No child, generally under the age of 16 may take part in dangerous performances. But, from the age of 12 children may be trained to take part in dangerous performances but only under licence. This should be authorised by the Local Authority in advance of the performance and extra vigilance maintained by you throughout.

Records, by law (ref.39 (5)), should be available to a visiting officer of the local authority by producers. Chaperones are often designated to keep these in respect of the child:

- times child is at the place of performance
- times child performs and/or rehearses
- times child has breaks and meals
- times child is waiting between performances, i.e. re-scheduling

If you feel under pressure to accommodate a production's schedules and you are unsure of the legalities of what they may be asking of the child, you should check the regulations before agreeing to anything.

Failing a satisfactory conclusion, phone the local authority either at the time or as soon as is practically possible for further advice or support.