

Safeguarding children

Albert Heaney, EADA's newly-appointed child protection officer, offers essential guidance for those working with children and vulnerable adults



These days it is very important to be proactive in safeguarding dancers under the age of 18. Whilst many children enjoy a healthy childhood, some experience difficulties that few adults

can understand. Dance is a wonderful sport, an activity that is a pleasure both to participate in and to watch; it is seldom associated with child abuse.

We know that child safety in sport is crucial, as when things

go wrong it can have a tragic impact upon a young person's life. Anyone who has followed the media will be able to recall some serious child abuse concerns in sport, although abuse may not be associated with the

sport itself but may relate to a child's life events outside of it.

Sadly, most children and young people who suffer abuse know their abuser closely. Children can experience abuse of different kinds, including physical, sexual, emotional, neglect, bullying, and domestic abuse. The impact of abuse can be wide ranging and may result in nightmares, behavioural difficulties, family relationship difficulties, poor peer relationships, poor academic achievement, eating disorders, feelings of guilt, anxiety, blame, loss of self-esteem, powerlessness, mistrust, anger and depression.

Children have the right to grow and develop in a safe and caring environment. They have the right to be protected from child abuse. Any organisation that has contact with or works with children and vulnerable adults has a duty to ensure they are properly cared for and protected. For this reason everyone needs to know how to keep children safe and what to do if there is a child protection concern.

The Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA)

Currently it is good practice for adults who work with children to complete a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check. The CRB check provides up-to-date information on criminal convictions. The newly-established Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA) seeks to ensure stronger

safeguards to protect children and vulnerable adults. The ISA will consider wider intelligence on an individual's behaviour and will have the power to bar an individual from working with children or vulnerable adults where appropriate.

It is important to understand the reason why the ISA was created. The Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006 was passed as a result of the Bichard Inquiry into the Soham murders in 2002, when two school-aged girls were murdered by a school caretaker. Intelligence around his past could have concluded that he was unsuitable to work in an environment related to children.

The ISA will work in partnership with the Criminal Records Bureau, which will gather relevant information on every person who wants to work or volunteer with children or vulnerable people. Only applicants who are judged not to pose a risk can be ISA registered.

The ISA defines a regulated activity as any activity that involves regular contact with children or vulnerable adults. As such, those involved in paid or unpaid activity will be required to register. It is a criminal offence for an employer to allow a barred person or a person who is not ISA registered to work for any length of time in any regulated activity.

From July 2010 all new entrants to roles working with children and vulnerable adults and those switching jobs will be able to register and be assessed by the ISA. They will be legally required to register by November 2010, and all existing members of the workforce will be phased into the scheme by 2015.

What EADA can do for you

The English Amateur Dancesport Association (EADA), the recognised governing body for Amateur dancers in England, has developed a child protection policy. EADA takes its responsibilities very seriously and has appointed a child protection officer, who can be contacted for advice. It is a positive step to adopt a safeguarding policy and to develop safeguarding awareness training.

More than half of the children and young people whose views were sought in a recent safeguarding consultation exercise stated that they had received text messages, or been contacted through a website or chat room by someone they did not know. Many young people know of children who have given personal details to people who they do not know but with whom they have had contact via the internet.

Recently, EADA have become aware of some concerns around parents seeking partner matches for children. It is important to remember that not everyone is who they say they are on the internet; online protection is a real issue. Of course, sometimes we are enthusiastic to find the best match for our children with the perfect dance partner, but it is important to play it safe. If you understand the internet and the risks posed, there are a number of things you can do to keep children and young people safer online. →

Opposite photograph
© Mitch Aunger, Fotolia.com.

DanceKnowledge

- ✓ Provide adult contact details only – do not provide direct contact details for your child (no mobile numbers, email addresses, social websites etc)
- ✓ Make all appropriate arrangements through your child's dance teacher
- ✓ Never allow your child to go to a try-out alone
- ✓ You can be friendly and cautious at the same time – don't provide videos or photographs of your child to a stranger
- ✓ Please use notice boards at dance schools (with permission) to put up adverts rather than the changing rooms/toilets of either gender
- ✓ Please do not put up advertisements with photographs and children's contact information
- ✓ If in doubt, ask EADA for advice.

Guidelines for responding to child protection concerns

Children and young people often find it very difficult to talk about abuse, so adults have a vital role to play in listening and enabling children to speak out and share concerns.

- ✓ Listen carefully rather than just asking questions
- ✓ Don't make promises you may not be able to keep such as not telling anyone, when you will need to share concerns in order to protect the child
- ✓ Be clear about confidentiality and explain your duty to share
- ✓ Accept what you hear without passing judgement
- ✓ Be calm and supportive



© Marzanna Syncerz, Fotolia.com.

- ✓ Inform the child or young person of what you are going to do
- ✓ Afterwards, make careful notes as soon as possible
- ✓ Contact the appropriate professional person – the police, social services or an NSPCC representative. Do not delay; the child may face further harm.

The vast majority of people would never abuse a child. It is the few, often deceptive individuals, who we need to be on guard against. EADA is able to provide advice and support through its child protection officer role – no query is too small and no problem too big. EADA can assist with raising awareness in clubs and organisations and can share its knowledge and experiences to promote safeguarding children and young people, whether this be through providing guidance on photography or videoing,

or the importance of ensuring separate changing facilities are available at competitions. Remember: it's never too late to learn, and prevention is always better than cure. ●

Contact EADA's child protection officer for advice by emailing childprotection@eada.org.uk.

If you are concerned about a child or young person, or you are a child or young person with concerns, please contact the police or local social/children's services department or call the **NSPCC Helpline** on **0800 800 5000**, or **Childline** on **0800 1111**. For new ISA guidelines and updates visit isa.gov.org.uk. For online protection, you can report directly to the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre at ceop.gov.uk. For a useful guide to internet safety visit thinkuknow.co.uk.