

Health and safety

As part of planning, BYT promotes the importance of health and safety awareness throughout the youth theatre movement. Having both a policy and procedures for Health and Safety helps to ensure that everyone involved with BYT (participants, staff, volunteers, audiences, etc.) are made to feel safe and protected from accident, injury or illness.

Introduction

A serious and thorough approach to health and safety matters should be a key feature of every youth theatre, large or small. It need not be daunting. This is said because much in the field of health and safety seems complex and meant for larger enterprises than most youth theatres. But it is essential to establish and follow safe practice within all activities. In particular, you should exercise diligence and common sense at all times. Good health and safety policy and practice are not optional extras. Youth theatre activities can be hazardous. But they do not, generally, pose too many high levels of health and safety risk. In fact, most risks that are posed can be removed or adequately controlled with a careful approach.

Risk assessments - what is entailed?

All of the regulations about health and safety emphasise the importance of making 'risk assessments'. Linked to this is the prior need to identify hazards. Here are the definitions:

Hazard: Anything that has the potential to cause injury or harm.

Risk: The likelihood, great or small, of the potential for harm being realised and causing an accident or incident.

Making a 'risk assessment' has no fixed rules but the accepted advice is to adopt the procedure as follows:

- Identify the hazards within set activities (Activity)
- Assess the risks posed by the hazards (Risk)
- Decide - and act on - the 'control measures' to manage the risks (Action)
- Implement the control measures and monitor their effectiveness (Assign Responsibility)

See example of a model Risk Assessment

At the start of each session/production, the Leader/Production Manager will remind participants of main safety points. This will depend on the circumstances, location etc but could include some of the items below.

NOTE: Although it is useful to have a person with the overall responsibility for health, good health and safety practice is actually the responsibility of everyone.

A survey of the health and safety literature, with youth theatre in mind, helps to identify certain high level risks with potentially serious consequences.

- Fire hazards
- Siting of exits
- Slips and trips
- Handling props and scenery
- Collisions during active sessions
- Hygiene (eg multiple use of costumes, make-up, and activities involving bare feet)
- Availability of medical information about participants
- Safety in connection with demanding physical activities

Specific risks related to electrical equipment, use of ladders , handling of heavy equipment, special effects etc

Consideration should also be given to the safety of the audience.

First aid training

It is recommended by BYT that regular session leaders undertake a course of first aid training. This should be refreshed and updated approximately every three years. BYT will try to make this training available to leaders.

Accidents

Under the Health and Safety Act 1974 an accident book must be kept and all accidents entered in it as they occur. Organisations with less than five employees are not obliged to maintain an accident book. However, BYT strives for best practice in safety and will record accidents as they occur. A report form is available with the first aid kit which Leaders will have at all sessions. Accident reports on members should include: Name, date, time, place, adults present, brief description of accident and action taken.

An imperfect world

It's an imperfect world and occasionally, accidents do happen. But it is the job of all responsible organisations to be health and safety conscious and to show that they have taken every action 'so far as is reasonably practical' to manage and minimise the risks.

Special note

The information above offers general advice on good health and safety practice only. There are legal requirements in respect of health and safety including, eg rigorous regulations for electrical installations. BYT, in establishing policy and practice, will seek the advice of local health and safety experts, eg the team operating within Scottish Borders Council may be able to offer advisory help. Also, the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) can offer detailed help and a wealth of information.