



Personal
Managers'
Association



**Working with Children in Theatre and on Screen
Good Practice Guidelines
For Parents, Agents, Casting Directors and Producers**

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For annual review

The following is a set of protocols compiled by the Children's Working Group of the Personal Managers' Association (PMA) with Spotlight. Our intention is to address frequently asked questions – and occasionally misunderstood issues – regarding good practice when working with children. This document does not attempt to be a comprehensive guide. We simply set out to highlight a set of standards, based on our collective experience as children's agents, which constitute good practice when working with children.

We've divided the document into three sections addressing common concerns for the three adult groups directly involved in the employment of children as actors: Parents, Agents, and Casting Directors. There is inevitable cross-over in the issues covered; these three groups are inextricably linked. We highly recommend you look through the whole document.

To conclude we've compiled a list of organisations mentioned throughout the guide. We hope this is useful.

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SECTION ONE: PARENTS

Many parents enter unknown territory when their child starts acting, so we have listed below some key areas of guidance to help you to inform and support them.

The Agent representing your child

The agent's role is to suggest the children they represent for jobs. They liaise directly with the casting directors and producers to schedule auditions, negotiate job contracts and manage licensing and chaperoning (as required). They support the parent and their child, to help them find the right roles, and put their name forward. Your agent can guide you on how to best present your child on their profile, including choosing the perfect headshot, and advising on the content and quality of their showreel or voice reel. A good agent/parent relationship is vital.

Most children's agencies opt for sole representation and we recommend this. However, you may choose to work with another agency covering a different field of work e.g. a voice over or overseas agent. As parents you need to ensure good communication with each agent re availability for auditions and work.

The Casting Director auditioning your child

The casting director's role is to find performers. They look for the best talent for each role on stage or screen and work through myriad applications, searches and agent suggestion lists to find the best fit. It is a complex process with often hundreds of profiles to consider. Once short-listed they will schedule and run auditions and any further recalls to ultimately cast the project.

The Producer in charge of the project

The producer finances the project, be it a theatre production, a commercial, a TV drama or feature film. They will hire a casting director to help them find the right performers for their project.

A Child Coordinator (theatre only)

Once a child is cast there may be a child coordinator who will liaise with the agents (and the parents) . Sometimes the coordinator will do the rehearsal and playing schedule. Occasionally they are also asked to negotiate on behalf of the Producer. It is important that agents are included in negotiations. Child coordinators are subject to the fee structures laid out in SECTION FOUR of this document.

The Parent/guardian responsibility and involvement

As a parent or guardian of a child in the performance industry, or 'The Industry' as you will often hear it referred to, you have a key role to play in supporting your child both emotionally during the inevitable highs and lows they will experience, but also on a practical level getting them to and from auditions and helping them to learn scripts and record self-tapes.

Informing the agent of anything important that may affect your child's audition or job availability is crucial, for example family holidays and school commitments. Also any changes that could impact the jobs they are suitable for e.g. changes to your child's appearance (e.g. haircut, height) or skillset (e.g. skateboarding, surfing, or trapeze) .

The Casting Platform your child appears on

A casting platform links the three key players in the casting process, the agent, the casting director and the performer. It is where your child's profile can be displayed, found and viewed by casting directors. It

is where casting directors share job information directly with agents; and where agents can suggest the performers they represent for those jobs.

Spotlight is the primary casting platform in the UK and Ireland, hosting a wide database of professional performers, graduates and young performers. It is used every day by leading casting directors and agents across the globe. If represented by a Spotlight approved agent, your child can be invited to become a Spotlight member.

Tagmin for parents (approved Spotlight partner)

Tagmin is software used by many agents to streamline their workflow e.g. to record castings, offers and jobs, and track payments. Your child's agent may 'invite' you to create a Tagmin account for your child where you can enter your child's profile, photos and self-tapes; legal information needed for licensing; and non-available dates (e.g. holidays). Tagmin is an approved partner of Spotlight and therefore the data from a child's Spotlight profile feeds directly into their Tagmin account.

Self-tape auditions

Self-taping is widely used by casting directors as a first stage audition option, often with tight deadlines. Being 'self-tape ready' is important. All agents will be knowledgeable about this process so discuss it with them. For more information take a look at Spotlight's self-tape article here: [Setting up and Filming Young Performer Self-tapes](#)

Photographers

Larger agencies may have a reputable photographer that they use with a set fee charged. Using them means the agent and parent have confidence in the finished images and also prevents parents having to find photographers who may not be used to shooting appropriate casting headshots.

Auditions in the room

A valuable piece of advice for younger performers from all casting directors, is that they should try not to worry about perfection and think more about showing willingness to take direction, good instincts and being themselves.

Social media accounts for children

Social media accounts are not essential. A parent should think carefully before engaging in the world of social media on behalf of their child. Seek advice from the agent first and let them guide you on this. It is better for your child to figure out their online presence as they start to get older.

Updating your child's profile

Keeping a child's profile (or CV) up to date is imperative. On Spotlight both the parent and the agent have access to do this, so establish which of you is responsible from the get-go in any parent/agent relationship. This is a useful article to refer to: [Editing a Young Performer's Spotlight Profile](#)

Equity membership for children

Equity is the performer's union. It has a responsibility to ensure that actors are paid and treated fairly and can provide advice. Children can join Equity from the age of 10. Parents of child Equity members, can call on advice from the union. Equity staff members, located across the UK, have experience and knowledge of all areas of the industry and are happy to give advice to members and their agents. This Spotlight article contains information: [What Equity Can Do for My Child](#)

SECTION TWO: AGENTS

For new or aspiring agencies

Setting up An Agency

Regulations

You do not require a licence to set up as a talent agency. There is no regulatory body governing talent agents in the UK. Agencies are legally classed as “employment agencies”. As such you have a legal requirement to be compliant with the Employment Agencies Act 2003. [Information can be found here.](#)

Client Agreement

You will see in the link above that you are required to provide Terms of Business for your clients.

Joining fees

Agencies are legally prohibited from charging an upfront fee for registration. You can charge upfront fees for listing the performer’s details in promotional publications or on websites to help them find work. [Guidelines can be found here.](#)

Commission

As a group of independent agencies we cannot “set” a rate for commission. Most agencies charge commission on theatre projects of around 10-15%. And generally more for work on screen.

Handling clients’ money

We recommend that money collected on behalf of your clients be kept in a separate bank account (a client account). The following links are useful:

[The Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Businesses Regulations 2003 Regulation 25 regarding client accounts](#)

Agency Regulations for Working with Children

Child Protection

You must have a Child Protection Policy (CPP). Ideally a copy of this should be readily available on your website. The NSPCC has good guidance on writing a policy, see here: [NSPCC](#)

We recommend enhanced Disclosure and Barring (DBS) checks for all agents working with children. The following organisation may be helpful - [Umbrella Solution DBS](#)

You will also need a Privacy Policy in line with General Data Protection Regulations. Again, this should be clearly displayed on your website. You can find more information here: [ICO](#)

Child Licensing

A child will need a licence if they're under school leaving age and taking part in: films, plays, concerts or other public performances that the audience pays to see, or that take place on licensed premises; and any sporting events or modelling assignments where the child is paid. Children should never work without a licence in place, not least because this would invalidate the production's insurance.

[Government advice on licensing can be found here.](#)

Applying for a licence?

The issuing of licenses varies from council to council. Councils are entitled to demand 21 days' notice of any licence application, though in practice an application may be processed in 7 to 10 working days.

Agents should resist pressure to license children before they are booked, as this needlessly adds to the councils' workloads and only makes it harder to license children who are actually booked.

Children in Entertainment [NNCEE](#) includes legislation and guidance for the whole of the UK and Ireland.

Agencies holding auditions

If holding auditions or meetings to meet new clients make sure all present from the agency hold a valid Enhanced DBS certificate. Ensure the child is given adequate time to prep for this meeting (script work/ monologues etc). There should never be a charge for auditioning to be on an agency and if you decide to provide a workshop-based audition this should be done so at your own cost.

Headshots

You will need to have good headshots for your clients and update them every 6/12 months - children change quickly and it is important that casting directors are seeing as up-to-date an image as possible. A good headshot need not be very expensive – it just needs to look like the child and show their personality. You may choose to organise photo sessions for headshots. This should always be offered at as reasonable a rate as possible for parents and include copies of the photos.

Updating a Spotlight profile

If the client is on Spotlight, establish with your parent/guardians a clear understanding of how important it is to keep the profile up to date, specifically height, headshots, skills and credits, and who is responsible for this, you or the parent/guardians themselves.

Agency Software

Most agents used bespoke software to manage their workflow, the most common of which are Tagmin and AgentFile.

Equity's Industry Information Service (IIS)

You will find more about contracts in SECTION 4 of this document, but we wanted to recommend joining [Equity's Industry Information Service](#) which is an invaluable resource.

SECTION THREE: CASTING

For casting directors and producers and agents

This section was written in consultation with a number of Casting Directors, all members of the Casting Directors' Guild (CDG), and the Casting Directors Association (CDA). We are very grateful for their input. Casting is likely to be the first time that parents, agents and casting directors are involved together. Although this is compiled with casting directors in mind, it will be useful for producers, agents and parents too.

Casting and Production Regulations for Working with Children

Licenses

Children working have to be licensed by their local education authority (defined as where Council Tax is paid, not where the child goes to school) and as such the producer is responsible for making sure that those regulations are adhered to. You can find them in Children in Entertainment [NNCEE](#) which provides legislation and guidance for the whole of the UK and Ireland.

Briefly, they give hours children of various ages can work, what breaks they must have, the time they should leave the workplace and how many hours between when they leave the workplace and are called in the next day.

The issuing of licenses varies from council to council. Councils are entitled to demand 21 days' notice of any licence application, though in practice an application may be processed in 7 to 10 working days. It is against the Children's Act to apply for a licence without a contract. It is permissible to apply for a licence if a child is hired as a standby, but the standby must have a contract and be paid daily rates accordingly.

Overseas Licenses

There are additional checks that need to happen for an overseas licence application. With everything in place, the local police authority have to be notified before heading to court. Seven days of notice is the requirement, as this allows the police time to undertake the necessary checks on the parental or licensed chaperone accompanying the child abroad. This is for the child's safety. [This Spotlight article provides helpful guidance.](#)

Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks for castings

Casting Directors *do* need an Enhanced DBS check when casting children in any type of production. Ideally we'd recommend DBS checks for assistants and/or camera persons if present. This provides reassurance for parents which is crucial if you intend (and we would recommend) to audition a child without parents in the room. Other options: a chaperone could be hired specifically for the casting session; and some casting suites will provide DBS checked staff.

Issues to consider when casting children that differ from casting adults?

Child safety is paramount

Realistic and safety-aware time frames need to be considered. Where possible try to avoid large numbers at casting sessions. (Agents and Parents please be aware that over-scheduling sometimes happens due to last minute cancellations, or late confirmations – good communication helps everyone)

Self-Tapes

Give a child more than 24 hours to do a self-tape. School, homework etc will take priority. Time is needed for learning too, learning under pressure becomes a “memory test” rather than an honest performance. Please be very clear what you want and how you want it, including your preferred way of receiving e.g. Tagmin, Vimeo etc.

Clear, accurate information about roles

Parents, who are likely new to the industry and nervous for their children, will value clarity and simplicity. For example, age ranges may be complex - is it actual age or playing age? Another example, does the role need options? The impact for children may be more complicated than for adults.

Managing adult themes

If the role requires a high level of maturity due to violence or adult content, inform agents and parents of appropriate guidelines to ensure the child’s emotional and physical well-being. Measures will vary e.g. meeting with the adult cast prior to the read-through (especially cast playing parents) or a discussion with a child psychologist.

Keeping a dialogue between CD, agent and parents

This ensures that parents bringing their children along to audition are completely across the project and have sanctioned its content. If you are filming in an audition, permission should be granted by the parent – have these forms ready to be signed at the casting session.

General good practice for working with children

At casting sessions try and introduce yourself to the child/parent – allowing the parent to know who you are, to confirm any special requirements (these should ideally be known about ahead of time) and help the child to feel comfortable from the get-go. If you are unable to greet each candidate then can your assistant/associate do this? If you are auditioning online be mindful that an adult should be present somewhere in the space.

The audition process is formative for children. Kindness, respect, humour all ensure that the experience is fun and uplifting. Weeks of workshops can be tiring, so engaging warmly with both child and parent is key. Even if a child doesn't get the gig, they can say they had a really fun time, so the memory of auditioning is a good and positive one.

Recalls or First Auditions

Give the agent and the parent enough notice. Parents often need to arrange child-care for other children, organise school picks ups, and work as well. Try to avoid last minute changes to scripts. If the child has been given something to prepare make sure they are given the opportunity to display this first. If something different or additional is required consider giving time for preparation in the waiting room, and be aware that not all children will be able to manage this.

Try not to have a packed waiting room. Time sessions realistically to avoid a build-up in the waiting room, alternate roles as you would with adults.

If you go to second recall – try and get a recall fee or fares for your short list. The cost of the fares is often less than a coffee run for a production company.

For Producers and Directors: You, and anyone you employ are responsible for showing respect to the child. They are young but if you have auditioned them and given them a role then you must feel they are going to be an asset to the production. Treat children with the same dignity afforded to the rest of the cast. They need to know about the production and what is happening; what you as a producer expects from them and what they can expect from you. You are responsible for the child's safety both physically and mentally.

When the role is cast do try and let the unsuccessful children know as soon as possible, these are small people who bruise easily. Contact the agent if they have one or the parent if not. Even if this is a blanket email – something is so much better than nothing. This should also be standard practice after the first round to those who definitely haven't made it to the second. Nothing is worse than a child waiting and waiting only to be told by a friend from Saturday morning classes that they have got a recall or indeed got the job.

SECTION FOUR: FEES and CONTRACTS

The following is a basic framework. Minimum fees are exactly that – agents are entitled to negotiate up. At time of writing employment of children is less regulated than other areas of our industry. The PMA Children’s Working Group is taking a proactive stance with Equity to improve the working terms for young actors and treat them with the same dignity afforded to adult talent.

THEATRE		
	Minimum Fee	No less than 50% of the adult rate. There are no overtime payments because a child has to stay within the regulations and can only work a certain number of hours.
	Contract	Equity/SOLT West End Contract
	Other considerations	If you are not successful in negotiating an Equity/SOLT deal you should ensure that you negotiate a fair travel contribution gauged on zones of required travel and a guaranteed hot meal on matinee days.
FILM AND TV		
	Minimum Fee	No less than half the PACT-Equity minimum engagement fee and production days for adults. This should be negotiable depending on the size of the part and the experience of the actor
	Contract	PACT-Equity
	Other considerations	In line with agreed adult standards set by PACT/Equity Agents will always ask for buyouts. Or a guaranteed minimum that equals the buyout fee.
SVOD Streaming services such as Netflix, Amazon etc		
	Minimum Fee	Budgets vary but series tend to be considerably higher paid taking into account the typical 7-10 year usage and worldwide rights.
	Contract	PACT-Equity or SAG

	Other considerations	Options: If there are options for future seasons or exclusivity clauses then the fee can (and should) be greater to allow for this. Some SVOD shows follow the US model of paying an inclusive episode fee, but in any case the fee for a UK actor should be no less than a US actor.
BBC		
	Minimum Fee	The current BBC Rate Card is below standard PACT-Equity minimums. Equity has been fighting hard to reach agreed rates with the broadcasters, in the meantime we advise: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o 50% of the adult minimum engagement fee o 50% of the production day fee and o 35% ROW.
	Contract	Under 16s via BBC Over 16s via Equity/BBC
	Other Considerations	
ITV		
	Minimum Fee	No less than 50% of adult minimum engagement rate in PACT-Equity agreement – per BBC advice above.
	Contract	There is no provision for children in the main ITV Agreement. However there are agreements, including reasonable rates for the engagement of children on Emmerdale and Coronation Street.
	Other considerations	
Commercials		
	Minimum Fees	Basic Studio Fee (BSF) can be between £180 to £250 per day for under 16s. Over 16s would be paid adult rates. All buyout fees would be based on a % of the BSF. E.g. TV, UK, 1 year would be 500% BSF. Be cautious of low fees on Worldwide buyouts. Travel & rest days are based at 50% BSF, chaperone fees are payable £90-120 per day. Recalls and wardrobe fittings should be paid for at £40-50 per session. If buyouts are to be

		<p>purchased for subsequent years then a 5-10% uplift is usually applied.</p> <p>Also note there is often, not always, an audition fee of £18-20</p>
	Contract	Equity/IPA
	Other considerations	<p>When asked for additional territories or re-usages visit www.usefee.tv for guidance on fees</p>

Section Five: Index Of Industry Organisations And Useful Links

Child Protection

[Writing a safeguarding policy statement](#)

[DBS checks](#)

[General data protection](#)

Agency Regulations

[Employment agencies](#)

[Fees for performers](#)

[General data protection](#)

Child Licensing

[Performance licences for children](#)

[The National Network for Children in Employment and Entertainment \(NNCEE\)](#)

Industry Organisations

[Casting Directors Association](#)

[Casting Directors' Guild](#)

[Equity](#)

[Equity Industry Information Service](#)

[Personal Managers' Association](#)

[Spotlight](#)

[Usefee.tv \(commercials info\)](#)

Agent Software

[AgentFile](#)

[Tagmin](#)