

Casting Children & Young People in South London Theatre Shows, Main Season

Introduction

This guidance applies to children and young people (under 18s) being cast in shows in South London Theatre's (SLT) main season. It does not include casting for the annual youth theatre show.

Working with children in a cast can be a rewarding experience. It adds another dimension to a show and is popular with audiences. For the children and young people concerned it provides them with an experience of being in a fully produced show and further develops their confidence and dramatic skills. South London Theatre has delivered many successful shows with children and young people and the guidance in this paper is intended to make the experience a positive one for all concerned.

- Casting someone under 18 years of age has safeguarding implications.
- Casting anyone under legal school leaving age¹ requires them to be chaperoned² at all times throughout auditions, rehearsals and shows.

If, after reading this paper you have any questions please contact SLT Youth Theatre Manager, Teresa Donoghue at training@southlondontheatre.co.uk

Background

South London Theatre is a community, amateur theatre for adults. Membership options are available for anyone aged eighteen or over.

However, from time to time a show in the main SLT season will require a child/children to be cast and we encourage Directors to explore casting options from within South London Theatre's diverse and talented Youth Theatre which has over 140 Youth Theatre members aged between 6 - 17 years.

Casting from within SLT Youth Theatre supports Equity, Diversity and Inclusion because SLT Youth Theatre attracts a diverse membership from our local community and also offers concession places thereby enabling children from low income families to participate.

Selecting the children during Youth Theatre classes, rather than inviting them to specific auditions, enables children whose parents are unable to bring them to an audition to be considered.

Casting from within SLT Youth Theatre supports safeguarding because Youth Theatre members and their parents/carers are well known to the Youth Theatre staff who provide almost all the chaperone cover. It means chaperones are aware of key information including any medical, physical or learning needs.

¹ NB. School leaving age is the last Friday in the school term after a child's sixteenth birthday.

² A Chaperone is a parent or guardian, or an adult who has successfully completed chaperone training and has an enhanced DBS Certificate. SLT YT manager has a record of qualified chaperones.

Casting from within SLT Youth Theatre also supports SLT Youth Theatre because the opportunity to be considered for casting in SLT main season shows attracts members.

The Appendices below provide guidance on casting children and young people.

Appendix 1: Process and timeframe for casting a child or young person.

Appendix 2: When casting can't be met from within SLT Youth Theatre membership

Appendix 3: Chaperones

Appendix 4: Guidance to cast and crew where children/young people are in the cast.

Appendix 5: Managing Safeguarding - DBS checks

Appendix 6: Procedures and Form for Directors to notify Youth Theatre Manager

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Appendix 1: Process and timeframe for casting a child or young person.

When	Who	What to do	Why needed
During show selection process	Theatre Committee	Theatre Committee to alert YT Manager of any plays they are considering for inclusion in next season that include or potentially could include children in the cast. TC takes potential chaperone availability into account in timetabling.	To agree an initial view on appropriateness of child casting in a particular show. There are particular times of the year when chaperone resources are stretched e.g. Rehearsals for the Christmas show already overlap with those for the annual YT show, putting a heavy demand on chaperone time at the end of November - early February. It would be helpful to avoid a third show requiring chaperones during that time.
On confirming submission accepted	Theatre Committee	TC to provide said Director with a copy of the SLT Policy and Guidance for including children and young people in shows	
Within two weeks of confirmation of show dates	Director	To make contact with SLT YT Manager and complete the form of needs (available from the YT Manager)	If timing allows this information exchange should happen before adult auditions - so the YT manager can confirm the likelihood (or not) of finding a match within the Youth Theatre membership.
Within two weeks of receipt of Directors completed form of needs. (sooner if show dates are early in the season)	Youth Theatre Manager	Contacts the Director to discuss any potential issues and to agree a date for the Director to attend attend Youth Theatre re casting,	NB Youth Theatre operates over three terms and is closed from mid July until early September. Initial approach to Youth Theatre for Christmas Show casting may need to be done at the end of the summer term.
Between receiving Directors' completed form of needs and auditions	YT Manager	The YT Manager will arrange for DBS Checks for Director, Assistant Director and Stage Manager	

<p>Attending Youth Theatre to cast your child roles</p> <p>(date agreed in advance with YT Manager)</p>	<p>Director/AD</p>	<p>YT Manager and YT staff will gather all the children who meet the criteria set out on the Directors completed needs form.</p> <p>Director, AD and potentially key adult cast member(s) have options to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Observe the children in class. - Leading exercises with the children. - Briefing YT staff to ensure the children cover what you need to see 	<p>This practice means that each Director is able to choose from all the children who meet their stated criteria.</p> <p>Auditions being effectively part of their weekly class enables children whose parents would be unable to bring them to a specific audition to be considered. It also means that the children are relaxed and perform at their best.</p>
<p>After attending YT session for casting</p>	<p>Director/AD</p> <p>Youth Theatre Manager</p>	<p>Director draws up a short list of children they would be happy to cast in each role, placing names in order of preference.</p> <p>Starting with the Directors top choice for each role YTM will contact the parents to :</p> <p>Confirm child availability for the show and rehearsals.</p> <p>Oversee parental consent form completion. Including consent for publicity photos.</p> <p>Will give parent/carer contact details to the Director.</p>	<p>Starting with the Directors top choices for casting in each role, the YTM will ring parents/carers and work through the Directors list in order of preference until the roles are filled.</p> <p>In the unlikely event that no one is interested or available, and YT staff are unable to recommend another suitable candidate there will be a discussion about externally advertising the role.</p> <p>In practice, it has always been possible to fill the roles from the Directors list of top choices. Such is the enthusiasm to take part, parents have been known to cancel prior arrangements to give their child the opportunity.</p>
<p>A month before rehearsals start</p>	<p>Director</p>	<p>Shares rehearsal schedule with YT Manager and highlights when children are called.</p>	<p>YT Manager will need as much notice as possible to ensure chaperone availability, usually at least two weeks in advance</p>
<p>At least two weeks each rehearsal week.</p>	<p>Director</p>	<p>To confirm which rehearsals children are called.</p>	<p>NB Late changes resulting in chaperones being cancelled may result in them still being paid. Because many will have turned down other paid to commit to chaperone duty.</p>

A week before the start of each rehearsal week	YT Manager	To confirm the name of the chaperone for each rehearsal including children.	The Director should contact the Youth Theatre Manager immediately if a chaperone fails to turn up.
At Read Through Or individually with anyone not present at the initial read through	Director	Gives guidance to cast and crew re working with children, including need for any scenes requiring physical contact with a child to be choreographed, taking of photos and filming rehearsals.	Ideally do this without the young people being present.

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Appendix 2: When casting can't be met from within SLT Youth Theatre membership

With a diverse membership of over 140 YT members aged between 6 and 17, we are confident that YT members will be able to fulfil most casting ambitions. However there may be a rare time when specific characteristics are required for a role e.g. ability to sing soprano and play grade 8 equivalent piano. If after discussion with SLT Youth Theatre Manager and/or visiting Youth Theatre, it seems that the specific casting requirements are unlikely to be able to be met from within the current Youth Theatre membership, then the role can be advertised externally. In these circumstances under 18's need to be accompanied to their audition(s) by a parent or guardian.

If casting is from outside of SLT Youth Theatre, the Director needs to inform YT Manager of child/ young person's name(s), role and parent/carer's names and contact details within a week of casting, so that the YT Manager can oversee completion of parental consent forms and their membership application.

Under 18's 'show only' membership is only available via a link which the YT manager sends. Membership fees need to be paid before the child attends an initial read through.

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Appendix 3 : Chaperones

A chaperone is required for any child under school leaving age, A chaperone can be the child's parent or guardian.

Alternatively a chaperone can be an adult who has successfully completed chaperone training, which includes having a current enhanced DBS Certificate. An official chaperone is a paid role, current SLT chaperone rate is £12.80 per hour. The cost of providing chaperones for rehearsals and show week will be deducted from the show profits, (After VAT payments)

Helpful tip :

Where possible schedule scenes that require child(ren) on same day or at one end or other of the rehearsal time - children get bored and tired

NB Chaperone costs aren't expected to be met from within the nominated show budget, which is for costumes and scenery.

SLT YT manager has a record of qualified chaperones who are permitted to chaperone for South London Theatre productions.

SLT YT Manager will arrange chaperone cover - but needs Directors to provide timely information re rehearsals. .

If you have any concerns about a particular chaperone, or if something goes awry during rehearsals please make a written note and let the Youth Theatre Manager know as soon as possible.

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Appendix 4: Guidance to cast and crew where children/young people are in the cast.
(Ideally given by Director at initial read through)

Touch

Any scenes which require a child to be 'touched' need to be carefully planned and choreographed. Until they have been, adult cast members shouldn't improvise. The Youth Theatre Manager can advise further.

Photos/filming rehearsals

Directors and cast are not allowed to take photos of the children/young people during rehearsals.

Only photos/ videos taken by a designated photographer are to be used for publicity, the programme and SLT archive. This will be included within the parental/carer permissions sought by Youth Theatre Manager before rehearsals begin.

Use of words/language

During show time, Director/Stage Manager and Chaperones will work together to ensure children are shielded from words and actions that occur on stage which are inappropriate.

Directors will be asked to provide a list of words and or issues that may be raised whilst the child is on stage so that YT Manager/staff can agree with parents and guardians how these will be explained.

During rehearsals cast members need to ensure they don't rehearse scenes/run lines containing inappropriate words or actions in the presence of a child or young person.

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Appendix 5: Managing Safeguarding - DBS checks

Director, Assistant Director and Stage Manager should have a current DBS check. These cost £16 each and will be paid for by SLT and facilitated by SLT Youth Theatre Manager.

Appendix 6:Form for Directors to share casting requirements with Youth Theatre Manager



Procedures for Children and Young People taking part in performances.

1. The Director completes a detailed summary of what is needed by filling in the form below. The play, the role, timings for the play including rehearsals and performance, how many youngsters needed and ages, any particular talents required (eg singing, accents etc) and submits this to the Youth Theatre Manager (YTM).
2. The YTM reads the requirements and agrees dates for auditions with the Director. These should take place within drama classes on a Saturday or Friday evening with agreement from the YTM.
3. The Director will audition with the YTM or drama staff present.
4. The Director will indicate which youngsters have been chosen, and the YTM will contact parents to check if their youngster would like to be part of the show and is available for the rehearsals and performances. When this is agreed, the YTM will share the parents/carers contact details with the Director.
5. Once a youngster is given the part, and rehearsal dates are known, if there is only one youngster cast the YTM will ask parents/guardians if they can accompany their youngster on all the dates. For any rehearsals or performances where the parent/guardian cannot be present, or there is more than one child, a chaperone is needed. The YTM will arrange for chaperone cover as needed according to the rehearsal schedule provided by the Director.
6. The Director must inform the YTM of any changes to the schedule as soon as possible. And also inform the YTM immediately where any issues arise with chaperones, for example, a chaperone doesn't show up.

Form for Children and Young People taking part in performances

Title of the play	
Names and emails of the Director, Assistant Director and Stage Manager	
Dates and times of performances	
Number of young people required	
Age/s	
Description of role/s	
Any specific skills needed	
Proposed dates of auditions. These must take place on Friday or Saturday drama classes and be arranged with the YTM.	
Proposed dates of rehearsal.	
Details of successful actors YTM to complete.	
Parent/guardian permission received	
Photo permission checked.	