

Child Protection & Safeguarding Policy 2026

This document provides details of Gems Performing Arts and Gems Holiday Clubs Safeguarding Policy. We recognise our moral and statutory responsibility to **provide help and support the needs of children as soon as problems emerge**. We are alert to the signs of abuse, neglect and exploitation and follow our procedures to ensure that children receive effective support and we protect them from maltreatment, inside or outside the home, including online.

In accordance with the 2026 Ofsted Framework and updated statutory guidance, this setting operates under the principle of **Paramount Consideration**. This means that in every decision made regarding the clubs' operation, including recruitment, activity planning, and physical environment; the **safety, rights, and best interests of the child** are the primary factor.

Key Staff

1) **Head Designated Safeguarding Leader; Melissa McKeigue** (Centre Manager)

Melissa@gemsperformingarts.com / 07540 080726

2) **Deputy Designated Safeguarding Leader; Marcella Freeman** (Manager/Teacher)

marcella@gemsperformingarts.com / 07793 500415

Roles & Responsibilities

Every member of Gems has an equal responsibility to report any concerns they may have around child safety, whether that is within or outside the home or online. Staff are required to report any incident **directly to the DSL Melissa McKeigue**, who will take the appropriate action in accordance with this document. With regards to school workshops and after school clubs, all Gems teachers will be notified who the designated safeguarding teacher is within each school they teach at. All concerns will be reported directly to the school and to DSL Melissa McKeigue. Any report will then be followed up with the appropriate action taken.

Safeguarding & Child Protection Procedures

All staff should be aware of indicators of abuse, neglect and exploitation (see below), understanding that children can be at risk of harm inside and outside of Gems classes, inside and outside of home, and online. We recognise that child abuse does happen and can take its form in a number of ways including: physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse and neglect.

- **Abuse:** is a form of maltreatment of a child. Somebody may abuse or neglect a child by inflicting harm or by failing to act to prevent harm. Harm can include ill treatment that is not physical as well as the impact of witnessing ill treatment of others, for example, when children see, hear or experience domestic abuse and its effects. Abuse can take place wholly online, or technology may be used to facilitate offline abuse. Children may be abused by an adult or adults or by another child or children.
- **Physical abuse:** may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces illness in a child.
- **Emotional abuse:** is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child, such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve conveying to children that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate or valued only for meeting the needs of another person. It may include not giving the child opportunities to express their views,

deliberately silencing them or 'making fun' of what they say or how they communicate. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of maltreatment of a child, although it may occur alone.

- **Sexual abuse:** involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including penetrative and non-penetrative acts. They may include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, pornographic material or watching sexual activities, or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways.
- **Neglect:** is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development. Neglect may occur during pregnancy as a result of maternal substance misuse. Once a child is born, neglect may involve a parent or carer failing to provide adequate food and clothing or shelter, including exclusion from home or abandonment; failing to protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger; failure to ensure adequate supervision, including the use of inadequate care-takers; or the failure to ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment. It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs.

Indicators of Abuse

Signs of possible abuse, neglect and exploitation may include:

- Significant changes in a child's behaviour
- Deterioration in a child's general well-being
- Unexplained bruising or marks
- Comments made by a child which give cause for concern
- Reasons to suspect neglect or abuse outside the setting, eg in the child's home, or that a girl may have been subjected to (or is at risk of) female genital mutilation (FGM), or that the child may have witnessed domestic abuse
- Inappropriate behaviour displayed by a member of staff, or any other person. For example, inappropriate sexual comments, excessive one-to-one attention beyond the requirements of their role, or inappropriate sharing of images.

If Abuse is suspected or disclosed

It takes a lot of courage for a child to disclose that they are being neglected and/or abused. They may feel ashamed, particularly if the abuse is sexual, their abuser may have threatened what will happen if they tell, they may have lost all trust in adults, or they may believe, or have been told, that the abuse is their own fault. When a child makes a disclosure to a member of staff, follow points below.

During your conversation with the child:

- Allow them to speak freely.
- Remain calm and do not over react – the child may stop talking if they feel they are upsetting you.
- Give reassuring nods or words of comfort – 'I'm so sorry this has happened', 'I want to help', 'This isn't your fault', 'You are doing the right thing in talking to me'.
- Do not be afraid of silences – remember how hard this must be for the child.
- Under no circumstances ask investigative questions – such as how many times this has happened, whether it happens to siblings too, or what does the child's mother think about all this.
- At an appropriate time tell the child that in order to help them you must pass the information on.
- Do not automatically offer any physical touch as comfort. It may be anything but comforting to a child who has been abused.

- Tell the child what will happen next. The child may agree to go with you to see the company management. Otherwise let them know that someone will come to see them before the end of the session.
- If possible, record the child's words, the time and the date of the conversation.
- Report verbally to the Designated Safeguarding Lead.
- Write up your conversation as soon as possible on the **Logging a concern form** and hand it to the DSL
- Seek support if you feel distressed.

If a member of staff witnesses or suspects abuse, they will record the matter straightaway using the **Logging a concern form**. If a third party expresses concern that a child is being abused, we will encourage them to contact Social Care directly. If they will not do so, we will explain that the Club is obliged to and the incident will be logged accordingly.

Female genital mutilation (FGM)

FGM is an illegal, extremely harmful practice and a form of child abuse, and is therefore dealt with as part of our existing safeguarding procedures. All of our staff receive training in how to recognise when girls are at risk of FGM, or may have been subjected to it.

If FGM is suspected or disclosed

When a girl under 18 discloses she has FGM, or when the professional sees this: report is to be made to the police via the 101 non-emergency number. This is a mandatory requirement to disclose.

Child on child abuse

Children are vulnerable to abuse by their peers. Peer-on-peer abuse is taken seriously by staff and will be subject to the same child protection procedures as other forms of abuse. Staff are aware of the potential uses of information technology for bullying and abusive behaviour between young people. Staff will not dismiss abusive behaviour as normal between young people. The presence of one or more of the following in relationships between children should always trigger concern about the possibility of peer-on-peer abuse:

- Sexual activity (in primary school-aged children) of any kind, including sexting
- One of the children is significantly more dominant than the other (eg much older)
- One of the children is significantly more vulnerable than the other (eg in terms of disability, confidence, physical strength)
- There has been some use of threats, bribes or coercion to ensure compliance or secrecy.

If child on child abuse is suspected or disclosed

We will follow the same procedures as set out above for responding to child abuse.

Extremism and radicalisation

All childcare settings have a legal duty to protect children from the risk of radicalisation and being drawn into extremism. There are many reasons why a child might be vulnerable to radicalisation, eg:

- Feeling alienated or alone
- Seeking a sense of identity or individuality
- Suffering from mental health issues such as depression
- Desire for adventure or wanting to be part of a larger cause
- Associating with others who hold extremist beliefs

Signs of radicalisation

Signs that a child might be at risk of radicalisation include:

- Changes in behaviour, for example becoming withdrawn or aggressive
- Claiming that terrorist attacks and violence are justified
- Viewing violent extremist material online
- Possessing or sharing violent extremist material
- If a member of staff suspects that a child is at risk of becoming radicalised, they will record any relevant information or observations to the DSL.

Logging a concern

All information about the suspected abuse or disclosure, or concern about radicalisation, will be recorded on the **Logging a concern** form as soon as possible after the event. The record should include:

- Date of the disclosure, or the incident, or the observation causing concern
- Date and time at which the record was made
- Name and date of birth of the child involved
- A factual report of what happened. If recording a disclosure, you must use the child's own words
- Name, signature and job title of the person making the record.

The record will be given to the DSL who will then follow up all referrals to **Lewisham Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)** within 24 hours. If a child or young person is at IMMEDIATE risk, you should treat this as an emergency and call 999 to report your concerns to the Police. You can contact the MASH during office **hours on 020 8314 6660**. The out of office hours (5pm -9am weekdays, weekends and Bank Holidays) is: 020 8314 6000 and ask for the emergency duty team. If a member of staff thinks that the incident has not been dealt with properly, they may contact MASH directly.

For minor concerns regarding **radicalisation**, the DSL will contact **Lewisham MASH**. For more serious concerns the DSL will contact the Police on the non-emergency number (101), or the anti-terrorist hotline on 0800 789 321. For urgent concerns the DSL will contact the Police using 999.

Confidentiality and sharing information

Child protection issues warrant a high level of confidentiality, not only out of respect for the child and staff involved but also to ensure that being released into the public domain does not compromise evidence. Staff should only discuss concerns with the DSL, who will then decide who else needs to have the information and they will disseminate it on a 'need-to-know' basis. If any member of staff receives a request from a child or parent to see child protection records, they should refer the request to the DSL. The Data Protection Act does not prevent staff from sharing information with relevant agencies, where that information may help to protect a child.

Allegations against staff

If anyone makes an allegation of child abuse against a member of staff:

- The allegation will be recorded on an **Incident record** form and sent directly to Emma Drysdale, Principal of Gems Performing Arts. Any witnesses to the incident should sign and date the entry to confirm it.
- The allegation must be reported to the **Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)** and to **Ofsted** immediately. The LADO will advise if other agencies (eg police) should be informed, and the Club will act upon their advice. Any telephone reports to the LADO will be followed up in writing within 24 hours.
- Following advice from the LADO, it may be necessary to suspend the member of staff pending full investigation of the allegation.
- If appropriate, the Club will make a referral to the Disclosure and Barring Service.

Promoting awareness among staff

The Club promotes awareness of child abuse and the risk of radicalisation through its staff training. The Club ensures that:

- The designated DSL and Deputy have relevant experience and receives appropriate training in Safeguarding and the Prevent Duty, and is aware of the Channel Programme and how to access it.
- Designated Person training is refreshed every two years
- Safe recruitment practices are followed for all new staff
- All staff have a copy of this **Safeguarding policy**, understand its contents and are vigilant to signs of abuse, neglect or radicalisation
- All staff are aware of their statutory duties with regard to the disclosure or discovery of child abuse, and concerns about radicalisation
- All staff receive basic safeguarding training
- All staff receive basic training in the Prevent Duty
- the Club's procedures are in line with the guidance in 'Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023)' and staff are familiar with 'What To Do If You're Worried A Child Is Being Abused (2015)' and reviewed every two years.

Whistle Blowing

All staff and volunteers should feel able to raise concerns about poor or unsafe practice and know that such concerns will be taken seriously by the DSL. If there is a conflict of interest then issues should be reported to the Principal, Emma Drysdale or the local authority. The NSPCC runs a whistleblowing helpline on behalf of the Home Office, the number is 0808 800 5000.

Staff Wellbeing and Vigilance

Under the 2026 Leadership & Governance standards, we recognize that a stressed or overworked teacher is a safeguarding risk. We aim to reduce unnecessary administrative tasks and respect teacher's working hours. Staff are encouraged to report concerns about a colleague's conduct or their own mental health to the **DSL** without fear of professional reprisal.

Vaping & Smoke-Free Environment

In accordance with the statutory requirements of the 2026 Ofsted Framework and the Health Act, this setting operates a strict 100% smoke and vape-free policy across the entire premises. To fulfill our "Paramount Consideration" duty, the use of tobacco and all electronic nicotine/non-nicotine delivery systems (vapes) is prohibited at all times by staff, parents, and visitors. This applies to all indoor areas, outdoor play spaces, car parks, and entrances. We recognize our role in modeling healthy lifestyles; therefore, this restriction ensures children are protected from second-hand and third-hand exposure to harmful substances and the normalization of nicotine products.

Use of mobile phones and cameras

When photographic or video footage is recorded Gems will:

- Seek parental consent for any images or footage to be taken for marketing purposes before the class/club.
- Never use the child's name.
- Ensure that children are appropriately dressed

- Encourage children to tell us if they are worried about any photographs that are taken of them.
- Photos are taken only on the company's phone and then uploaded to a secure, private folder on our Gems drive if the photograph is to be used for future marketing. If it will not be used further, then it is deleted immediately. Photos are not to be taken on personal phones of the staff members and staff phones should be stored away for the duration of the camp.

Mobile Phones

Using mobile phones or similar devices are not permitted during Gems classes unless a genuine reason is specified and approved by a teacher e.g. calling a parent. Please see further our Mobile Phones policy.

Complaints Procedure

Our complaints procedure will be followed where a child or parent raises a concern about poor practice towards a child that initially does not reach the threshold for child protection action. Poor practice examples include unfairly singling out a child, using sarcasm or humiliation as a form of control, bullying or belittling a child or discriminating against them in some way. Complaints should be reported directly to the DSL or Ofsted if further action is required.

Equality and diversity

All children, regardless of age, gender, ability, culture, race, language, religion or sexual identity, shall be treated equally and have the same opportunities at Gems. Gems staff have a responsibility to ensure our programme is varied and where all cultures are celebrated.

Inclusion

We recognise that exclusion is a safeguarding risk. We aim for *Scaffolded Play*; guiding and assisting children to ensure those with SEND or those from disadvantaged backgrounds can join in all our activities and receive extra support from teachers. We encourage communication between carers and teachers to support all children.

Contact numbers

Social Care: **Lewisham MASH 020 8314 6660**

Social Care out of hours: (5pm -9am weekdays, weekends and Bank Holidays) is: 020 8314 6000

LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer): **Caroline Aitken, Lewisham LADO 020 83147280**

LewishamLADO@Lewisham.gov.uk

Police: **101** (non-emergency) or **999** (emergency)

Anti-terrorist hotline: **0800 789 321**

NSPCC: **0808 800 500**

Ofsted: **0300 123 1231**

This policy was adopted by: Gems Performing Arts	Date:3/2/26
To be reviewed: 3/2 / 28	 Signed