

Lewisham Youth Theatre Anti-Bullying Policy

LYT Mission Statement

All young people have a powerful voice and a right to be heard. Lewisham Youth Theatre (LYT) nurtures and inspires young people's voices through free participatory theatre activities, helping them to develop enduring and transferable skills that lead to increased chances of life and long-term well-being. We bring young people together from across the Lewisham community to create outstanding theatre in an environment of high expectations and collaboration. We work from the core belief that artistic excellence is key to expanding young people's horizons and creating lasting transformation.

Introduction & Policy Statement

Bullying is extremely damaging to young people. LYT aims to create an environment in which young people are psychologically and physically safe, where bullying is unacceptable, and young people are treated equally regardless of age, disability, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation.

This policy aims to:

- Produce a consistent approach to bullying across all LYT programmes.
- Ensure all young people, staff, volunteers, trainees, and facilitators understand their responsibilities in preventing, reporting, and responding to bullying.
- Embed a culture where hurtful behaviour is identified early and responded to reflectively, supportively, and in line with safeguarding duties.

This policy is written in accordance with the Equality Act 2010 and should be used alongside LYT's Safeguarding, IDEA and Social Media policies. It is supported by LYT's Membership Agreement and group contracts for each project.

The policy will be reviewed every 3 years and updated if necessary.

Definitions

Government guidance defines bullying as actions that are intended to be hurtful and occur regularly. Bullying can be direct (either physical or verbal) or indirect (for example, being ignored or not spoken to). At LYT, we consider forms of bullying to include microaggressions, deadnaming, misgendering and other forms of discrimination.

The 5 essential components of bullying:

- 1. Intention to harm:** Bullying is deliberate, to cause harm. E.g., friends teasing each other in a 'good-natured' way is not bullying, but a person teasing another with the intention to deliberately upset them is bullying.
- 2. Harmful outcome:** One or more persons are hurt physically or emotionally
- 3. Direct or indirect acts:** Bullying can involve direct aggression, such as hitting someone, as well as indirect acts, such as spreading rumours.
- 4. Repetition:** Bullying involves repeated acts of aggression. An isolated aggressive act, like a fight, is not bullying.
- 5. Unequal power:** Bullying involves the abuse of power by one or several persons who are (perceived as) more powerful, often due to their age, physical strength, or psychological resilience.

Signs and Symptoms of Bullying

Look for specific changes as detailed below in a young people but be aware that not all young people who are bullied exhibit warning signs.

Some signs that may point to a bullying problem are:

- Feelings of depression, loneliness, or increased anxiety
- Low self-esteem
- Headaches, stomach-aches, tiredness, or poor eating habits
- Missing sessions, a sudden disliking of LYT, or a lack of concentration or performance than previously
- Self-destructive behaviours, such as abruptly leaving sessions or inflicting harm on oneself others
- Mentioning methods of suicide
- Unexplained injuries
- Lost or destroyed clothing, books, electronics, or jewellery
- Increased tiredness in sessions
- Sudden loss of friends or avoidance of social situations i.e. games.

LYT's Approach to Bullying or Hurtful Behaviour

LYT workers will immediately challenge bullying or hurtful behaviour, including verbal, physical acts and gestures or body language. In the first instance, staff are encouraged to reinforce the positive culture of LYT and to refer to standards of behaviours expected of all.

Phrases that might be useful include: “Everyone works together at LYT”, “Could we find a kinder way to say that?”, “That language isn’t acceptable” etc.

Tools to Support Prevention and Reflection

All behaviour is a form of communication. LYT is a creative space and often a place of sanctuary for young creatives. While bullying is not acceptable, our response is educational and reflective, supporting all those involved. Facilitators may use the following tools:

- Membership Agreement – All participants sign LYT’s Membership Agreement (Appendix A), which outlines unacceptable behaviours and the consequences, including, persistent and severe disruption of workshops or rehearsals, violence – towards people or property and prejudiced remarks or behaviour.
- Group contracts - At the start of projects, participants work together to create a group contract that each member must sign and agree to adhere to. Things like: “Respect people’s pronouns”, “Don’t talk over each other”, “Respect each other’s belongings”, are examples young people have previously included.
- Physical and mental check-ins – where young people reflect on how they’re feeling physically and mentally their hands.
- Scenario-based games – used to explore peer pressure, bystander intervention, or respectful disagreement.
- Emotion cards and sentence starters – to support expression of feelings, especially for neurodiverse young people.
- Reflection circles – to open dialogue when harm has occurred or misunderstandings need unpicking.
- Debriefs and processing tools – particularly after challenging sessions.

Bullying Outside of LYT

If bullying takes place outside of LYT sessions but involves young people in our programmes, e.g. via a group chat with participants in, LYT will discuss the impact it has on safety and participation in our sessions, encourage open dialogues talking about why it may upset people, talk to specific members if necessary, and take safeguarding steps where required.

What is Not Bullying

LYT recognises that not all difficult interactions are bullying, for example, a disagreement or fallout between friends, a misunderstanding or accidental comment, or someone setting boundaries or expressing a need are not forms of bullying.

These will be approached with curiosity, not judgement, and supported through facilitated conversation, games, or conflict resolution tools.

Reporting concerns

Workers should report any concerning language, including gestures or body language, to the lead facilitators immediately if it's causing harm or at post-session debriefs. We choose not to use labels like "bully" or "perpetrator" as this language can be stigmatising. Instead, we acknowledge the behaviour and provide reflection, repair, and change-focused support.

If a young person makes an accusation of bullying, use the same disclosure procedure as detailed in LYT's Safeguarding Policy, and fill in the Safeguarding report form if necessary:

- Listen carefully to what is being said.
- Find an appropriate early opportunity to explain that it is likely that the information might need to be shared with others. *Do not promise to keep secrets.*
- Allow the young person to continue at their own pace.
- Ask questions for clarification only. Try to use the TED method, asking questions that start with "Tell", "Explain" or "Describe". Avoid asking questions that suggest a particular answer.
- Reassure the person that they have done the right thing in telling you.
- Tell them what you will do next and with whom the information will be shared.

The lead facilitators will pass this onto the Participation Manager (contact details below) immediately. The Participation Manager, along with the assistance of the lead facilitator or the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) will create a plan of action, as appropriate, to address the behaviour. This may include arranging a meeting to talk with the young person causing harm, young person who has experienced harm, a parent or carer, or the group as whole.

Support will be offered to the young person who have experienced harm, as well as the young person whose behaviour has caused harm. We will try to use clear boundaries and restorative approaches to address peer on peer conflict. Participants will be reminded of expectations to act with care and respect to peers both inside and out of LYT, including online.

If a young person is unable to work at their best, the Participation Manager and the core staff member of the project, will arrange another meeting with them and their parent/carer to discuss their behaviour and how it affects the group. During the meeting, staff will encourage them to consider what they need to do to continue the project. If unacceptable behaviour continues after this meeting, the young person may be asked to leave the group.

Further Concerns

If participants or parent/carers are not satisfied with the action taken by the Participation Manager, they should in the first instance contact the DSL (contact details below). Concerns should ideally be raised in person or over the phone so the DSL can get a good understanding of the concern.

The DSL will discuss the concern with the parent/carer, the Participation Manager, and the creative team to find a mutually agreeable resolution. The DSL will agree with the parent/carer and the young person further actions.

If an LYT staff member is accused of bullying, the DSL will share this accusation immediately with the Council of Management, who will be involved in addressing the concerns from the beginning.

If participants or parent/carers are unsatisfied with the actions taken by LYT staff and the DSL, they can raise a formal complaint with the Council of Management. Concerns should be written down and emailed or posted to the DSL. The DSL will forward to complaint to the Council of Management.

If the DSL is accused of bullying, the complaint should be sent directly to the attention of the Council of Management by email or info@lewishamyouththeatre.com.

The Council of Management will invite the complainant to a meeting to discuss concerns. Following this meeting, they will consider the complaint and provide a response in a written reply.

Appendix A Membership Agreement

TAKING PART IN LEWISHAM YOUTH THEATRE (LYT) TERMS & CONDITIONS

LYT has been running since 1987. Taking part in our projects is free and you need no previous theatre experience. Our aim is to provide a safe environment in which young people can develop skills and explore ideas, producing performances to a professional standard.

In order to fulfil these aims and for everyone to enjoy and succeed in our projects, we ask everyone taking part to agree to the Terms & Conditions below. These Terms & Conditions are for members and parents/carers.

Please read and discuss the terms below together before the start of the project.

In order to take part in LYT, young people need to:

- Live or learn in Lewisham
- Take part in no other out of school drama activities
- Be able to commit to attend all sessions
- Be willing to learn
- Be respectful of other members, tutors and directors
- Priority is given to those in state/free schools, academies or home schooling

If you are unable to attend a session:

You must let us know as soon as you know that you will not be able to attend a session.

You can report an absence, by telephone or text on 07435 969 157.

Please note: Repeated absence or absence during intensive periods may jeopardise your place on the project or the role that you are able to play.

Timekeeping

In order to be respectful to all members of the group and to ensure we have as much rehearsal time as possible, it is essential that you arrive in good time for your session and are ready to begin at the appointed session time. If you will be delayed, please call or text Lewisham Youth Theatre on 07435 969 157 and make sure to let us know when you will arrive.

Behaviour

Your group will agree on what behaviours the group needs in order for everyone to work at their best, and you will be asked to sign a group agreement once the project starts.

There is some behaviour that is considered unacceptable for all LYT projects, including:

- Persistent and serious disruption of workshops or rehearsals

- Bullying or causing intentional physical or emotional harm to others
- Violence – towards people or property
- Prejudiced remarks or behaviour

If you are unable to work at your best, your tutor will speak to you and your parent/carer about:

- Your behaviour and how this affects the group
- And encourage you to think about what you need to do to help you to continue with the project

If you continue to behave in ways that we find unacceptable, you may be asked to leave the group.

Working Together

LYT brings young people together from across the Lewisham community to take part in exciting theatre projects. Participants come from diverse social and economic backgrounds, and have different levels of experience with drama. We are committed to providing a space where every participant can feel welcome, valued and effective. By taking part in LYT, you agree to work with and act respectfully towards people who may be different to you.

What to Wear

You are expected to dress in comfortable clothing and shoes for each session.

Because you will be taking part in drama activities, you should be able to move easily and sit down on the floor in your clothing.

Personal Possessions

We recommend phones and personal electronic equipment be switched to do not disturb or similar at the beginning of the session. If a parent/carer needs contact a young person during session time, they should call LYT on 07435 969 157 or 020 83182508.

LYT is unable to take responsibility for any personal possessions, therefore we ask members to leave any valuables at home.

Use of Phones During Break:

LYT encourages young people to interact with their peers at break times, rather than being on their phones. To keep everyone safe, we ask that they do not post pictures of each other online without their consent. Make sure you're using your phone and social media in a way that keeps everyone at LYT feeling safe and like they belong. Remember to follow your group's contract even when you're outside the session, this includes in public or private group chats e.g. on Whatsapp or similar.

Dropping Off/Collecting Young People

You will be asked on the consent form if your young person can make their own way home or needs to be picked up. If your young person cannot make their own way home, you must drop them off and meet them at the session location. For safety, young people will not be permitted to leave until we have seen the known adult who is meeting them. If someone other than yourself is due to pick up your young person, please let LYT know in advance.

For health & safety reasons, family and friends who are not registered with LYT cannot attend the sessions.

Extra Support

If you feel you or your young person needs extra support to take part in LYT, please let us know.

We are happy to meet with members and parents/carers before sessions to help you understand what to expect and get to know the space.

How we use your information:

By returning a project consent form, you consent to LYT using your information to communicate with you about our programmes and make sure all members receive the support they need to access our activities. To learn more about how we use this information, download our full privacy statement at: www.lewishamyouththeatre.com/about-us/policies/

If you have a problem or have any questions about LYT's programmes, you can speak to:

- Maz Wright of Lewisham Youth Theatre

M: 07435 969 157 E: maz@lewishamyouththeatre.com

- Monique Uwiragiye of Lewisham Youth Theatre

M: 07960 095 064 E: monique@lewishamyouththeatre.com

You can read our policies, including our Complaints Procedure on our website: <http://www.lewishamyouththeatre.com/about-us/policies/>