



Feeling Safe in the Performing Arts

Feeling safe

Being a performing artist is a uniquely exciting and satisfying career. At the same time, most performing artists are faced with constant change – repertoire, technical and stylistic demands, colleagues, rehearsals and performing spaces. Touring artists can also face unfamiliar climates, cultural environments, and time zones. Of course, this is what makes life in the performing arts so exciting. On the other hand, adapting to change is challenging and it can reduce your sense of safety. As a young performer, you may need support as you become acclimatised to your new world and develop resilience to cope with future challenges.

Sometimes, you may feel unsafe about your work situation without knowing whether your concerns are valid, or whether you just need to “toughen up”. You may wonder whether people will think you are “not up to the job” or are a “whinger”. You may feel unsafe physically because of the technical situation – floor surface, costumes, physical structures, lighting, etc. You may feel unsafe because of the demands of the choreography or because you feel you have not had enough rehearsal, especially if you are required to interact closely with a colleague. You may feel unsafe because you are required to perform with an injury, when you are unwell, or without adequate rest. These are complex issues, and difficult for a young performer to solve without support.

Many people feel unsafe when they are in a new environment and have not yet developed a trust relationship with their peers. Without someone to listen to your concerns, even the smallest challenges can seem overwhelming. You need to be active in solving the problem. A more experienced colleague may offer you advice on solving the issue yourself, possibly through additional practice or by watching how others meet the challenge. If the situation is beyond your control, you may need to ask for help from your coach or teacher, rehearsal director, stage manager, physiotherapist or doctor. If none of these people can help you and the problem persists, you can follow a more formal procedure, as below. Before you do this, note in writing exactly what the issue is, your efforts to solve it, and how you think the issue could be resolved. Being well prepared will help you to approach the meeting calmly and positively.

Feel safe at work

You have a right to feel safe at work, and your employer has a **legal** responsibility to provide a **safe** workplace. Safety includes freedom from harassment, bullying, discrimination (including racism), violence, and situations where your physical and/or psychological safety could be at risk. Ideally, you should have been given orientation information covering your rights and responsibilities when you started your employment, and this document should describe how to lodge a complaint at your workplace. If not, start by asking a staff member for the safety and complaint guidelines, because different organisations offer different complaint paths. The websites below give you general details but, if your organisation has a human resources department or a designated manager for workplace safety, this is a good place to start. Alternatively, you could write to the General Manager, Artistic Director or Board Chairperson. If you feel these people are involved in the problem, or for any other reason are unlikely to help, you can go to the Media Entertainment Arts Alliance (MEAA) or to one of the government organisations listed below. For more information on your legal rights, see Safework Australia (website below).

Feel safe at your school or training place

You have a **legal right** to feel safe in your school or training organisation, free from harassment, bullying, discrimination (including racism), violence, and situations where your physical safety could be at risk. Your school or training institution is responsible for protecting you. If you have a problem, speak to your parents and friends so they can



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support you, then speak to someone you trust within your training place. This may be a teacher, the school psychologist, chaplain, nurse or the school principal. If none of these people can help, you may need to contact the Education Department (website below).

Safety and the law

Human rights are rights that are inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status. The Australian Human Rights Commission (website below) describes laws regarding human rights, including discrimination, harassment and bullying, and offers a complaints process that is focused towards reconciliation.

Harassment

Harassment is when a person is treated unfavourably on the basis of personal characteristics such as race, sex, age, disability, sexual orientation, etc. Insulting jokes, suggestive emails or text messages, offensive posters, derogatory comments about someone's race, and intrusive personal questions are against the law.

Sexual harassment

Sexual harassment is any unwanted or unwelcome sexual behaviour, including unwanted physical contact, jokes, emails, text messages, posters, comments and personal questions that offend, humiliate or intimidate you. All these are against the law.

Bullying

The Fair Work Amendment Act 2013 defines bullying as repeated unreasonable behaviour which creates a risk to your physical or psychological health and safety. It can range from obvious verbal or physical assault to subtle psychological abuse. Bullying linked to a person's age, sex, race, or disability is illegal. Your school or workplace must not tolerate it.

Racial hatred

Offensive behaviour based on racial hatred is against the law. Racial hatred is something done in public that offends, insults, humiliates or intimidates someone because of their race, colour, religion, or national or ethnic origin. Racist graffiti; racist insignia; racist speeches, posters and stickers; racist abuse in public places; and publishing offensive racist comments in the media, including social media, are against the law.

Assault

Nobody has the right to assault you, and any assault is a crime. Assault is the use of intentional and unwanted physical force against you that leads you to believe you are at risk of immediate harm, regardless of whether the actual harm occurs. Assault can include verbal threats, pushing, spitting, bruising and hitting. If you have been assaulted, it is important to seek help, advice and support.

If you or someone else is in danger, ring the police (000) as soon as possible. If you have been injured, go straight to a public hospital emergency department or a police station. If you need an ambulance, ring **emergency (000)**.

Sexual assault

Sexual assault may include rape, sexual penetration, intercourse, offensive touching or gross indecency without your consent. **If you are still in danger, ring the police (000).** When you are out of immediate danger, go somewhere you



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feel safe, such as the home of a close friend or a family member. For confidential counselling and information on what to do next, **ring 1800 RESPECT (1800 737 732), ring the police (000) or go to a police station.** If you have been raped or sexually assaulted, you should not feel ashamed or blame yourself for what happened. If someone tells you they have been raped or sexually assaulted, it is important that you believe them and show them compassion as well as practical support.

Lifeline (13 11 14), Beyond Blue (1300 22 4636), Kids Helpline (1800 55 1800), and 1800 RESPECT (1800 737 732) are all ready to help.

Useful websites

Beyond Blue – anxiety, depression, loneliness, suicide prevention, LGBTI: www.beyondblue.org.au/; T: 1300 22 4636

Bullying: www.safework.nsw.gov.au/health-and-safety/safety-topics-a-z/bullying/workplace-bullying

Butterfly Foundation – eating disorders: support@thebutterflyfoundation.org.au; T: 1800 33 4673

Education department: https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/national_safe_schools_framework.pdf

Emergency, ambulance or crisis: T: **000**. Be ready to say whether you want police, ambulance or the fire department

Feel safe at work: www.humanrights.gov.au/bullying-know-your-rights-violence-harassment-and-bullying-fact-sheet

Human Rights Commission – complaints and legal rights: www.humanrights.gov.au/complaint-information

Kids Helpline – any time, any reason, for under 25s: <https://kidshelpline.com.au/>; T: 1800 55 1800

Lifeline – crisis support, suicide prevention: www.lifeline.org.au; T: 13 11 14

Mental health support: www.healthdirect.gov.au/community-mental-health-services; <https://headspace.org.au/>;

Physical safety: www.liveperformance.com.au/work_health_safety

QLife – LGBTI support: <https://qlife.org.au/>; T: 1800 184 527

Sexual harassment: www.meaa.org/news/sexual-harassment-in-the-workplace/

Sexual health – safe sex, STIs, testing, contraception: www.healthdirect.gov.au/sexual-health

Substance abuse and addiction: www.lifeline.org.au/get-help/topics/substance-abuse-and-addiction; T: 13 11 14

Suicide Callback Service – crisis support: www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au/; T: 1300 659 467

Workplace complaint: Contact the union – Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance: www.meaa.org/contact/

1800 RESPECT - violence, abuse and sexual assault: www.1800respect.org.au; T:1800 737 732

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NB: This ASPAH Guide is intended as an educational resource only and does not replace professional advice. ASPAH recommends that diagnosis and initial advice is always obtained from an accredited healthcare professional.

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