

HOPEFUL MESS

THE 5 R'S OF SAFEGUARDING

A simple way to notice something's wrong, respond with care, and make sure the right people know

5 R'S OF SAFEGUARDING

01

RECOGNISE

02

RESPOND

03

REPORT

04

RECORD

05

REFER

1. RECOGNISE

Dance teachers are trained observers. You notice micro-shifts: a drop in energy, a hesitation, a young person suddenly avoiding eye contact.

To recognise means tuning into signs, for example:

- A young person withdrawing, shutting down, or becoming unusually loud
- Changes in confidence, mood, or physical presentation
- A vibe shift in the room that makes your gut whisper, “Hmm...”
- Behaviour that feels out of character

You might notice things before the classroom teacher does. Not because they don't care, but because sometimes movement reveals things talking doesn't. Trust that. Your embodied awareness is a valuable safeguarding tool.

2. RESPOND

If a young person shares something through words, behaviour, or silence, your job is to hold the moment gently. It is important to:

- Stay calm
- Listen without judgement
- Thank them for trusting you
- Keep them safe in the moment

Responding doesn't always look like a big conversation. Sometimes it's:

- slowing the pace of the class
- giving someone a quiet moment on the side
- checking in with a simple “You good?”
- offering a grounding exercise disguised as a warm-up

Small responses can be huge.

3. REPORT

When you go into a school setting, you're not the safeguarding lead, and that's a relief. Your role is to notice and pass it on. Always report what you've seen or heard to the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) or the teacher responsible for the class. If you can, know the DSL by name.

Reporting can be relational. Sometimes it's a quick corridor chat: "Hey, just flagging something I noticed today..."

Sometimes reporting can make you feel like you're snitching. You're not. When you report, you're contributing to a fuller picture of that young person's wellbeing.

Reporting isn't only for harm. It's also good practice to report positive things you've learned about a young person. For example: "They responded really well when I gave them a leadership role." "They focused better when the music was slower." "They lit up when we freestyled." Teachers can learn from you too, you see young people in a different mode.

4. RECORD

Write down what you saw, heard, or were told, as close to the moment as possible. When you record it's good to:

- Stick to facts
- Include dates, times, and exact wording
- Keep it simple

Recording is also self-care. It helps you release the emotional weight of what you witnessed. It's a way of saying: "I've done my part. I don't have to carry this alone."

Like a debrief with yourself. A moment to breathe, reflect, and reset before your next class.

Recording properly also protects you. Clear notes mean you're not relying on memory weeks later may you be asked about it.

5. REFER

In schools, referrals to statutory agencies are handled by the DSL, not you. But “referring” can also be much more community-rooted.

You might gently signpost a young person to:

- a community dance group
- a youth club
- a trusted community leader
- a mentor you know would be a positive influence
- a creative space where they can belong

These aren't safeguarding referrals in the legal sense, but they're protective factors. Sometimes the right community is the intervention. Referring is about widening the circle of care. You're helping a young person find more adults, more spaces, more support.

A NOTE FROM HOPEFUL MESS

When you walk into a school as a dance teacher, you bring presence, awareness, and the ability to read a room. Safeguarding is simply using those skills you already have to help young people feel safe and supported. The 5 R's give you a clear checklist to follow if a concern comes up.

We believe safeguarding is collective work. When we each pay attention, act with care, and pass things on, we build spaces where young people can move, learn, and belong without fear.

With hope,
Nzinga & Maren