



How to survive Pantomime

For Parents of Young Performers



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Pantomime for Child Performers

For a young performer, being cast in a professional pantomime is an unforgettable experience. For you, their parent, it is a masterclass in project management, legal compliance and household logistics.

This comprehensive resource aims to give you clear, plain-English guidance about the ins and outs of supporting your child in their panto journey.

Timeline

- **Summer to Early Autumn- Auditions:** Open workshop calls (or dance school auditions) where teams are selected.
- **October to November - The Administrative Phase:** Licenses applied for and permission from school requested. This is the time to submit an Access Rider ([find out how to write one here](#)).
- **November - Rehearsals:** Intensive rehearsals, usually taking place after-school and at weekends.
- **December - Tech Week:** Moving into the theatre, long days of technical staging rehearsals alongside the adult cast.
 - Children will work in teams and share the tech and dress rehearsals and performances.
- **December to January - Performances:** Exhilarating and exhausting - expect your child to fall asleep in the car on the way home!
- **Mid-January - The Post-Show Crash:** After the run has ended - expect some January Blues as your child returns to regular school routines.



Expectations

Panto is uniquely joyous but demands professional reliability. Your child must be able to pick up complex staging and routines quickly, stay focused during long backstage waits and perform with high energy even when tired. For families, this means late nights, sacrificing weekends and festive treats, managing strict school absence windows, coordinating transport and staying close to home over Christmas.

Jargon Buster

- **The Babes / Juvenile Chorus:** The teams of local children making up the young ensemble, performing alongside the main cast.
- **Open Call:** An audition open to anyone meeting the age or height criteria, rather than a private audition arranged through an agency.
- **Performance Licence:** A legally binding document issued by your Local Authority permitting a specific child to work in a commercial production.
- **BOPA (Body of Persons Approval):** A single group permission granted to an organisation, removing the need for individual licences while maintaining identical strict safeguarding limits.
- **Blocking:** The precise staging and physical movement of a performer on stage to ensure safety and correct positioning.
- **Teams:** Children are separated into teams to share the schedule. Make sure you let friends and family know which performances your child will be in.
- **Tech Week:** The intense rehearsal week before opening night where lighting, sound, scenery and costumes are integrated on the stage.
- **In Loco Parentis:** A legal term meaning "in the place of a parent." Backstage, a licensed chaperone holds this authority and has ultimate statutory responsibility for your child's safety.
- **Matinee:** An afternoon performance, which is the primary reason your child may require authorised school absences during term-time.
- **The Post-Show Crash / Panto Blues:** The recognised emotional and physical dip in mood caused by the sudden drop in dopamine and adrenaline once a production run ends.



Auditions

Professional panto auditions are high-energy, fast-paced, and highly competitive. While they are a brilliant way to build performance stamina, the "open call" workshop environment can be overwhelming for a young child and the reality of sudden rejection requires careful parenting.

Ways to support your child

- **Reframe the Goal:** Before stepping into the room, reframe what "success" looks like. It isn't getting the job, it's executing the choreography to the best of their ability, listening to the director and having fun.
- **Praise the Effort:** If your child doesn't get cast, avoid saying, "You were the best dancer there, they made a mistake." Instead, try, "I am so proud of how hard you tried to learn that tricky routine." This builds a growth mindset, teaching them resilience.
- **Build their Self Worth:** Remind them explicitly that they are loved and valued for who they are at home (e.g., being a kind sibling, a great friend, someone who makes you laugh) - not for whether a director picked them.



Questions to ask before rehearsals start

- Who is my child's chaperone?
 - How will emergencies be communicated?
 - What should they bring?
 - Is there parking?
 - When are photos allowed?
 - Where can parents wait?
 - Who do I contact if we're delayed?
 - If I have questions, who should I contact?
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- Can grandparents or other family members / friends collect from stage door?
 - Can I watch rehearsals?
 - Who washes costumes?
 - What happens if snow/bad weather stops travel?
-
- Do we get any complimentary tickets for parents to watch the show?
 - Is there a company discount code for tickets?



Rehearsals

Professional pantomimes have very short rehearsal periods - frequently compressing an entire complex two-act show into just two or three weeks of rehearsal.

Because the juvenile chorus is usually balancing school alongside intense evening and weekend blocks, physical exhaustion and psychological overload are not uncommon.

Supporting Mental Health

- **Preventing Sensory Overwhelm:** Rehearsal rooms are loud, high-stimulus spaces filled with music, rapid directions and dozens of high-energy kids and grown ups. If your child is prone to sensory dysregulation, ensure they have quiet, low-stimulus transitions on the journey home. Avoid questioning them the second they walk out of the stage door, give them space to decompress first.
- **Proactive Boundaries:** Watch for signs of people-pleasing behaviour. Children naturally want to please directors and choreographers and will often push through intense physical pain, extreme fatigue or anxiety just to get approval. Check in daily and let your child know that it is entirely okay to tell their chaperone if they are feeling unwell or mentally overwhelmed.
- **Heightened Emotions:** When a child's brain is exhausted from picking up fast choreography under pressure, that stress could manifest at home as emotional meltdowns, irritability or regression. Recognise this not as "bad behaviour," but as a dysregulated nervous system asking for safety, calm and (where possible) early bedtimes.



Licensing and BOPAs

In the UK, any child performing in a commercial, ticket-selling production is governed by the **Children (Performance and Activities) Regulations**. Legally, a child cannot simply show up and perform; the production must secure official permission via the child's home Local Authority in advance.

Producers will secure this through one of two routes:

Route A: An Individual Performance Licence

This is the most common route for professional productions. The producer submits an application for your specific child to your Local Authority's Child Employment Officer.

- **What you must provide:** You will need to supply a copy of your child's birth certificate, a recent passport-style photo, a parental medical declaration and a signed school permission form.
- **Chaperones:** Your child must be supervised at all times backstage by either you (the legal parent/guardian) or a fully licensed, council-approved chaperone. Note: Grandparents, aunts, or friends cannot act as chaperones unless they hold their own council-issued chaperone licence.

Route B: A Body of Persons Approval (BOPA)

An alternative framework where the Local Authority grants a single, overarching approval to the production organisation rather than issuing individual licences for every child.

- **When it's used:** Often used when there are large teams of children rotating frequently - and therefore often in pantomime productions.
- **NOTE:** Even under a BOPA, the production is legally bound by the exact same strict limits regarding working hours, mandatory rest breaks and licensed chaperone ratios as an individual licence.



School Attendance Thresholds

While headteachers have the legal discretion to authorise absences for licensed entertainment work, schools are under statutory pressure to maintain high attendance records.

The 95% Threshold

Most Local Authorities and school trusts enforce a strict rule: if a child's overall attendance record falls below **95%**, the school or the Child Employment Officer may refuse to approve the performance licence.

- **Check the Record First:** Before your child auditions, check their current attendance percentage on your school's parent portal. If they have had a period of illness earlier in the term, an absence request for panto might push them into the "persistently absent" category, which could block the licence.
- **Evidence academic achievements:** Even if your child has a lower attendance percentage, if their academic achievements are strong then you can discuss this with the head teacher and demonstrate that taking time out for a professional engagement will benefit the child and not compromise their academics.
- **Proactive Dialogue:** Do not surprise the school office with a completed licence application form. Speak to the headteacher or attendance officer casually in September to explain the opportunity, demonstrate your plan for keeping up with coursework and gauge their willingness to support the absence.



Distance & Travel Time

Under UK law, your child's maximum legal working day includes their travel time if the commute impacts their mandatory rest periods.

The Night Rest Rule: The absolute statutory curfew for young performers under 16 to be clear of the theatre venue is **22:00 (10:00 PM)**.

The law mandates a strict **12-hour rest break** between the time they leave the production's care and the time they are permitted to be back in the theatre.

- **Practical information:** Under the 12-hour rest rule, if they leave the venue at 22:00, they technically should not be engaged in performance activity until 10:00 AM the next day.
- **Fatigue:** While school attendance is separate from performance licensing rest blocks, a child getting home past 22:30 several nights a week may experience profound physical and academic exhaustion. Before agreeing to your child taking part in panto think about whether or not they have the stamina for a run of late nights before school mornings.



Red Flags Checklist - What to Ask the Producer

Ask the production company these questions when your child is offered a role. Defensiveness, avoidance or pushing costs onto you are significant red flags.

Financial & Casting

- **"Pay-to-Play" Fees:** Professional productions never charge performers. It is a major red flag if you are asked to pay for costumes, scripts, auditions, or mandatory training. Legitimate producers cover these costs and provide licensed professional chaperones at no cost to the parents.

Legal & Licensing

- **Bypassing School Absence:** It is a serious legal breach if a producer asks you to falsely tell a school your child is "sick" or on holiday to attend rehearsals. Professional performances strictly require a Local Authority Performance License or a formal BOPA.
- **Ignoring Rest Laws:** Reject schedules that ignore maximum daily venue hours or mandatory 12-hour overnight rest breaks. UK child performance laws are statutory; any pressure to squeeze these legal limits is a major warning sign.

Safeguarding & Environment

- **Vague Chaperone Arrangements:** Producers must confirm a licensed, DBS-checked chaperone is present. Backstage, every child must be under the continuous supervision of a parent or licensed chaperone within legal ratios (typically 1:12).
- **Unreasonable Phone Policies:** Watch out if there is no written device policy, or a total ban that blocks contact with parents. While phones should be restricted during changes for privacy, children must always have a secure way to contact home.

Communication

- **Last-Minute Scheduling:** Chaotic scheduling, like late-night texts for the next morning's call, paired with an ultimatum ("attend or your child is cut") is a clear warning sign. Professional companies respect family logistics; constant last-minute changes reveal poor welfare standards.



Chaperones

A licensed chaperone is a statutory safeguard, not a babysitter. Holding legal authority in loco parentis (in place of the parent), they protect your child's safety, welfare and legal rights backstage.

The Chaperone's Legal Duty: Welfare Over Production

A chaperone's primary loyalty is always to the child, never the producer.

- **Enforcing the Law:** If a rehearsal runs even 10 minutes past the legal limits, the chaperone must step in and pull the child from the stage.
- **Responsibilities:** While the director is responsible for the show, the chaperone is responsible for the child's safeguarding. If the creative team breaks licensing laws or pushes a child too hard, the chaperone has the legal right to say no and to report to the Safeguarding Lead (which could be the producer or stage manager) or to the Local Authority.

Communication

- **Chaperone and Child:** The chaperone is your child's safe person, managing dressing room dynamics, medical needs, costume changes and mandatory rest breaks. Children should feel empowered to tell their chaperone immediately if they are hurt, tired or overwhelmed.
- **Chaperone and Parent:** The chaperone is your eyes and ears. At sign-in and sign-out, share any vital updates (e.g., if your child is tired or anxious). In return, they should give you an honest debrief. They are your first port of call for concerns about backstage safety, illness or fatigue.
- **Parent and Production:** Parents should proceed with discretion when needing to ask questions. Always start with the chaperone and check who the appropriate person is to contact - usually the chaperone will have the information, but if they don't they might pass you on to the production team.

Stage Door Etiquette

The backstage area is a closed, secure environment. Unless you are a legally contracted, council-approved chaperone for that performance, you must not enter the dressing rooms or wings.



Kit List

A professional dressing room can be cold and drafty, and it's winter - so they'll be walking out into cold weather at the end of the show. Here are some items to have ready to go ...

- **The Snuggle Layer (Oversised Zip Hoodie or a dressing gown):** Costumes are often thin or made of itchy synthetic fabrics. Your child will need a warm, oversised garment to throw on over their costume.
 - It must zip or button up the front. A pullover hoodie will ruin stage makeup and mess up hairdos.
- **The Base Layers:** Wardrobe departments frequently share main outer costumes between teams of children. To maintain personal hygiene and comfort, parents often provide their own flesh-coloured dance leotards, soft seamless undergarments and specialised stage tights (usually two pairs of "panto pink" or tan tights).
- **Dance shoes:** Depending on the production it's possible that your child will use their own dance shoes.
- **Dressing Room Footwear:** Sliders, thick slipper socks, or clean Ugg-style boots. Walking around backstage barefoot or in socks is a safety hazard (due to stray costume pins or stage weights), and wearing heavy outdoor shoes can walk mud around the theatre (especially in winter).
- **Make Up:** Check with production on this - children / parents often provide their own.



Digital Safety & Navigating Stage Door

In a world of smartphones and social media, managing your child's digital footprint during a commercial show is a safeguarding necessity.

Backstage Privacy & Social Media Rules

- **The No-Phone Dressing Room Rule:** Under standard UK theatre safeguarding policies, mobile phones and smartwatches are strictly banned inside juvenile dressing rooms to protect the privacy of children changing into costume. Chaperones may collect devices at sign-in.
- **The "Costume Spoiler" Ban:** Production companies are typically forbidden from posting photos of costumes, backstage sets or dress rehearsals on personal social media accounts until after opening night.
- **The Cast Photo Boundary:** While it's lovely to grab a photo with the celebrity principal cast, always ask permission through the chaperone first. Never tag another child performer on social media without their specific parent's explicit consent, families may have complex reasons for keeping their child's location private.

Navigating the Public Stage Door

- **Managing the Public Eye:** For a child, walking out of the stage door to find fans waiting for autographs or programme signatures (usually for the celebrity adult cast rather than the young actors!) is thrilling, but it can quickly become overwhelming.
- **The Escape Plan:** Establish a firm rule with your child: they do not leave the safety of the chaperone or the stage door until they see your face. Keep the exit transition swift and calm. Remind them that while the applause is wonderful, the real world, and a good night's sleep, is what keeps them healthy and able to keep performing.



Panto Parent Survival Checklist

Before Auditions

- ☐ Check school attendance percentage
- ☐ Check passport photo available
- ☐ Birth certificate located
- ☐ Measure travel time
- ☐ Discuss expectations with child

Once Cast

- ☐ Write an Access Rider (if needed)
- ☐ Return licence paperwork
- ☐ Get a backstage zip up hoodie
- ☐ Label everything
- ☐ Save chaperone contact

Opening Week

- ☐ Pack snacks
- ☐ Water bottle
- ☐ Homework
- ☐ Phone charger
- ☐ Emergency medication



The Post-Show Blues

When a production ends, transitioning back to normal life can cause a difficult emotional landing. For weeks, your child has lived in a high-stimulus world of adrenaline, applause and a close-knit company. When that abruptly vanishes, it can trigger a physiological and biological dip.

Practical Strategies for Parents

1. Structure a "Soft Landing"

- **Low-Stimulus Window:** Keep the first post-show weekend clear for low-energy, comforting family time.
- **Prioritise Sleep:** Restore a consistent bedtime routine to help the nervous system recalibrate.

2. Validate the Emotional Comedown

- **Name the Feeling:** Explain the biology in age appropriate terms: "Your brain was running on superpower fuel, and it's completely normal to feel flat now."
- **Allow Space to Miss It:** Validate their grief for the cast and crew. Let them look at photos without forcing them to immediately move on.

3. Anchor Identity Beyond the Stage

- **Highlight Non-Performance Traits:** Praise ordinary hobbies to remind them they are valued for who they are, not just what they do.
- **Reconnect with Everyday Peers:** Organise low-pressure meet ups with non-theatre friends to ease them back into their regular community.

4. Create a "Closing Ritual"

- **Memory Keepsake:** Print backstage photos or write down favourite memories to preserve the experience safely.
- **Thank-You Notes:** Shift focus to active gratitude by writing cards for chaperones or castmates.
- **The "Next Fun Thing":** Schedule a non-theatrical milestone (like a day trip) to give the brain something new to look forward to.



Money and Logistics

When a child is cast in a professional production, the financial reality for the household can become complex. If your child is paid a performance stipend, travel allowance, or direct wage, understanding the administrative boundaries protects your household and ensures smooth project management. **NOTE - usually children are not paid for performing in the juvenile chorus.**

ALWAYS SEEK INDEPENDENT FINANCIAL ADVICE.

Child Earnings & Account Mechanics

- **The Legal Owner:** Legally, any performance fee or stipend paid for your child's theatrical work belongs strictly to your child.
- **Dedicated Accounts:** Most professional production companies will explicitly refuse to pay earnings or expenses into a parent's personal current account. To avoid delays, you should open a dedicated child savings or current account in their name (with you listed as the trustee or joint signatory) before contracts are finalised.
- **Tax Credits & State Benefits:** In the UK, a child's performance earnings are generally exempt from impacting your family's Universal Credit or Child Benefit allocations, provided the funds remain within the child's own account and are not used to subsidise basic parental household expenses.

Free Tool: The Sensible Creative Panto Finance Tracker

To help you manage, track and balance the true cost of a production against your child's earnings, we have built a completely free spreadsheet tool. (There's also guidance about HMRC and savings accounts)

[Access the Sensible Creative Panto Finance Tracker on Google Sheets here](#) (Click 'File > Make a Copy' to save your own private edit version).



School Absence Request Letter Template

Because pantomime schedules involve matinee performances, your child will likely need to miss some school time. Headteachers are legally permitted to authorise absences for licensed child theatrical performances, provided the child's academic standing and attendance record are secure.

Adapt this template to send to your child's school as soon as a contract is offered:

RE: Request for Authorised Absence for Licensed Child Performance Work

Dear **[Headteacher's Name]**,

I am writing to formally request a temporary, authorised absence for my child, **[Name]** in **[Year Group]**, to participate in the professional production of **[Panto Title]** at **[Theatre Venue]**.

[Name] has been cast in the juvenile chorus following a competitive professional audition process. This is a superb opportunity for **[Name]** to develop their performance and life skills.

The production company is currently processing an official **[Performance License / Body of Persons Approval]** through our Local Authority's Child Employment Team. To fulfil their contract, **[Name]** will need to miss school on the following specific dates and times:

- **[Date 1]**: [e.g., Afternoon session from 12:30 PM for a 2:00 PM matinee]
- **[Date 2]**: [Full day for technical dress rehearsals]
- Total school hours requested: **[Number]** hours.

We fully understand that school attendance is a priority. To ensure **[Name]**'s educational balance is maintained, we have agreed the following measures:

1. We will coordinate with **[Class Teacher's Name]** to collect all classwork and homework in advance.
2. **[Name]** will complete this schoolwork during the dedicated, quiet rest periods enforced by the licensed chaperones backstage during the production run.

I would be very grateful if you could confirm your approval for these sessions so that the council can finalise the safeguarding paperwork.

Thank you so much for your time, support, and for celebrating **[Name]**'s achievements outside the classroom.

Warm regards,

[Your Name]



Who to Contact

If you suspect bad practice, encounter hidden fees, or believe working hours regulations are being broken - use these resources to protect your family:

- **Your Local Authority:** Search your local council's website for "**Child Employment Officer**" or "**Child Education Welfare Team.**" This is the local body with the statutory power to revoke a production's performance licence if they are in breach of safeguarding laws.
- **The BOPA provider:** The BOPA will be issued by the LA that the theatre is located in, which could be different from where you live.
- **The National Network for Children in Employment & Entertainment (NNCEE):** Visit www.nncee.org.uk to read full breakdowns of the law or flag systemic bad practice anonymously.
- **The Host Theatre:** Contact the theatre management directly. Venues take a massive reputational risk when hosting visiting production companies; if a producer is engaging in bad practice on their premises, the theatre needs to know immediately.

This Resource was made by



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This resource has been made available for free. If you'd like to thank the creator then please consider buying her a cup of tea! (She'd be very grateful!)



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