
Child Actors

By Gary Michael Smith

Many parents would like to have their children become movie stars, in pursuit of a future of fame and glory, or to help them realize their own lost dreams. But in some cases, a parent may just want to have the child be an extra in a movie just for the fun of it and to give them experience in handling their own money. Whatever the reason, parents need to understand what's involved in having their children become performers, and what's expected.

First, a couple definitions are in order. The term "child actor" refers to an actor under the age of 18 in motion pictures or television, although the age may vary among states as discussed below. A "former child actor" applies to an adult who began his or her acting career as a child.

Children may find background acting exciting and financially rewarding, and it can teach them the value of responsibility. But before you list them with a casting company, make sure your child has both the stamina and the ability to take instructions from a director.

By no means should you pressure your child into show business. Only encourage and support them if they have the interest. You do not want to ruin a potentially good experience by being forceful and overbearing. Also, keep in mind that if your child is a minor, you will have to be present (within sight and sound) to supervise them for the entire time they are on the set.

The Irving Texas Film Commission outlines in its "State Law and the FilmMaker" guidelines, as reprinted from the Texas Production Manual, that "No child actor under 14 years of age may be employed where the parent, guardian, or person having custody of the child is prevented from being within sight and sound of the child at any time during employment." Moreover, as a general rule parents or adult guardians must have no other roles for the production such as actor, extra, or crew member.

So what restrictions can there be for child actors, other than having to have a babysitter while on location or on the set? In some countries, child actors are prohibited from doing certain things such as:



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- Risking his or her physical well being as in performing physical stunts
- Being exposed to morally compromising situations
- Being nude or partially nude
- Engaging in overt sexual acts

Compulsory education laws mandate that the education of child actor not be disrupted while the child is working. Consequently, the child does schoolwork under the supervision of a set teacher while on the set. Also, understand that the hours a child actor may work are limited; a very young infant might be allowed under the lights only a few minutes a day. Moreover, it's common for the role of a young child to be portrayed by identical twins to reduce a child's time on set.

For instance, Arkansas child labor laws, as they apply to the entertainment industry, state that no child under sixteen years of age may be employed in the entertainment industry:

- In a role or in an environment deemed to be hazardous or detrimental to the health, morals, education, or welfare of the child as determined by the Director of the Arkansas Department of Labor
- Where the child is required to use a dressing room which simultaneously occupied by an adult or by other children of the opposite sex
- Where the child is not provided with a suitable place to rest or play
- Where the parent or guardian of the child is prevented from being present at the scene of employment during all the times the child is working
- Where the parent or guardian of the child is prevented from being within sight and sound of the child
- Without a permit issued by the Director and the written consent of the child's parent or guardian for the issuance of the permit

The governing labor union, if any, and state and federal laws regulate the activities of child actors. However, limitations imposed by laws are not uniform across the states or beyond national boundaries. For instance, longer work hours or risky stunts, prohibited in



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