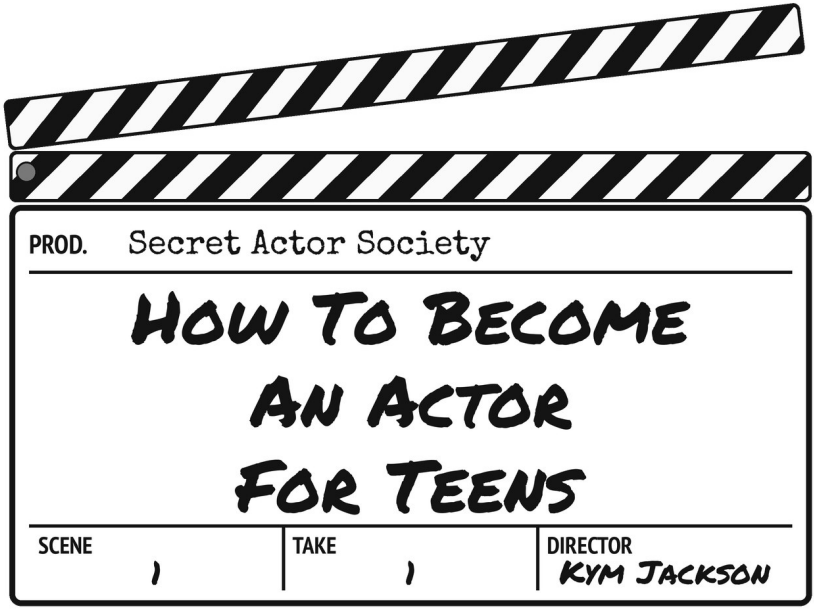
HOW TO BECOME AN ACTOR FOR TEENS

Simple principles for
starting out the right way

By Kym Jackson

Author of The Hollywood Survival Guide For Actors



Simple principles for young actors
and the parents who back them

Kym Jackson

SECRET ACTOR SOCIETY

How To Become an Actor for Teens
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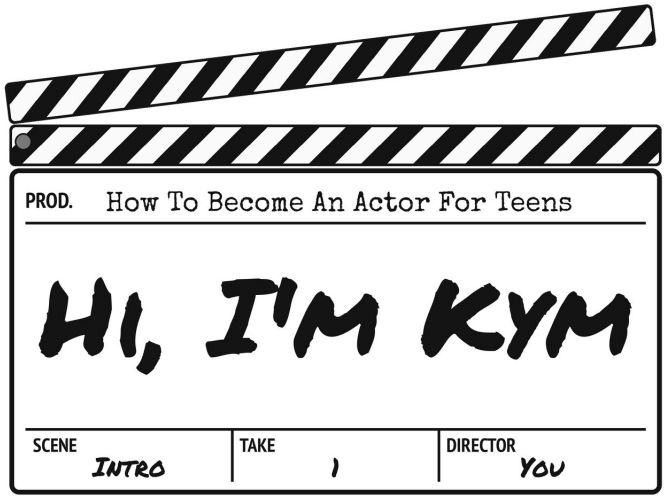
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This book is the short version of everything I wish someone had told me when I was your age.

I'm an Australian actress. I've worked in Hollywood for twenty years, in more than 80 film and TV roles, and I run Secret Actor Society, where actors learn the business from casting directors, agents and working actors.

Years ago I wrote a 300-page textbook for adult actors called The Hollywood Survival Guide For Actors. This is that book boiled down for teenagers. Fewer words, simpler rules, and the bits that matter when you're 13 to 17.

I've also added what our casting directors, agents and parent experts say in the Secret Actor Society videos. When a tip comes from one of them, I'll tell you who said it.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Each chapter is one principle. Read it, try the "Do this week" step, then move on.

You don't have to do everything at once. Nobody does.

At the end of most chapters there's a video to watch next. Most are short, and you can watch them with a parent.

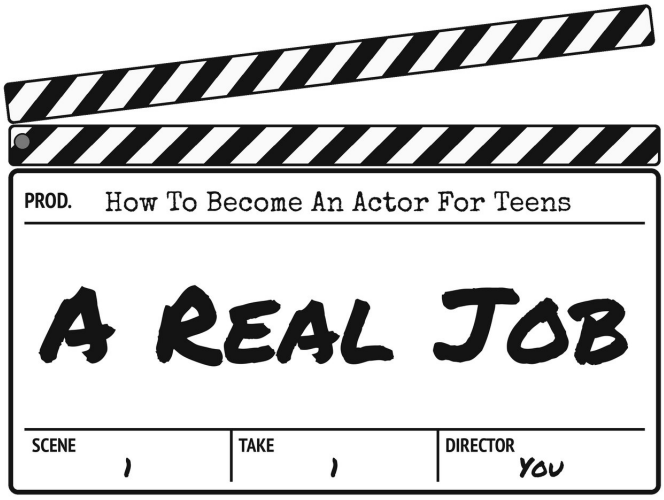
TWO PROMISES BEFORE WE START

First, I'll be honest with you. Acting is a long game. An overnight success is very rare, and most careers take years of steady work before they pay the bills.

Second, starting now is a real advantage. Every class you take, every short film you do and every person you treat well is building your reputation. In Hollywood, reputation is everything.

So... let's get you started the right way.

DO THIS WEEK Write down why you want to act. One paragraph, just for you. Keep it somewhere safe, because you'll want to read it on the hard days.



Acting is a real job, and you are a small business

Talent matters. But talent on its own isn't enough.

One of the saddest things I see is an average actor booking a great role because a great actor didn't know how to get the audition. Knowing how the business works is half the job.

FAMOUS IS NOT THE GOAL. WORKING IS.

A working actor is someone who acts regularly and earns a living from it. Most of them are not household names. You've seen them in hundreds of shows and never learned their names... and they're doing just fine.

Aim to be a working actor first. Fame, if it comes, is a side effect.

EXPECT YEARS, NOT MONTHS

Most actors I know needed about three years of steady effort before things started to turn, and longer before acting paid the bills. It took me five years of very hard work.

Here's the good news for you. Lindsay Lohan and Scarlett Johansson were competing for roles at eight and ten. Kristen Stewart and Zac Efron worked for years before the films that made them famous.

So ask yourself: how old are you now? How old will you be in three years? You'll get there either way. You might as well arrive with three years of training, footage and friends in the industry.

HOLLYWOOD RUNS ON TRUST

A producer is spending other people's money, often millions of dollars. Every time they hire an actor, they're taking a risk.

So they hire people they trust. People they've worked with, people who were recommended, people whose work they've seen.

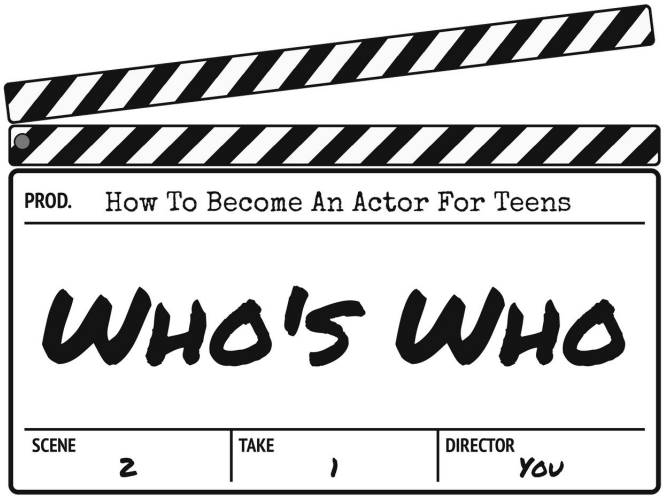
That means every class, every short film and every audition is a chance to prove you can be trusted. You're not waiting for one big break. You're building a body of work, one small step at a time.

YOU ARE THE PRODUCT

If acting is a business, then you're the product and casting directors are the customers. Your headshot, resume and reel are your marketing.

That sounds very grown up, but it just means this: make it easy for busy people to see who you are and what you're great at.

DO THIS WEEK Pick three actors whose careers you admire and look them up on IMDb. What did they do in their first five years? You'll find a lot of small parts before the big ones.



Know who's who

You'll meet a lot of people with confusing job titles. Here are the ones who matter most when you're starting out.

WHO	WHAT THEY DO	WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOU
Casting director (CD)	Finds and auditions actors for a project, then shows the best ones to the director and producers	The gatekeeper. If the CD doesn't put you forward, the director never sees you
Casting associate and assistant	Work with the CD, run sessions, watch self tapes	Treat them like the CD. They pick who gets seen, and they become CDs
Agent	Sends you out for auditions and negotiates your deals	Paid a percentage of what you earn, never up front
Manager	Guides your whole career, helps choose your team and your next steps	Also paid only from what you earn
Director	Leads the creative side of the film or show	Gives you notes on set. You do what they ask

WHO	WHAT THEY DO	WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOU
Producer	Finds the money, hires the team, keeps the project on track	Often has the final say on casting
2nd AD (second assistant director)	Looks after the cast on set, signs you in and out	Your go-to person on set for anything about where to be and when
Studio teacher	Teaches and protects young actors on set	Your schoolwork and your wellbeing person on set

CASTING DIRECTORS WANT TO FIND YOU

This surprises people. Most casting directors love discovering new talent. It's the fun part of the job.

But they also answer for every actor they bring in. So they mostly audition actors they already know, or actors someone they trust has recommended.

Your job, every day, is to get into the room. And once you're in the room, nobody cares how you got there.

RESPECT THE WHOLE OFFICE

The person behind the desk might be a future casting director. The reader in your audition might be the CD's boss. The intern deserves your respect just as much as anyone else in the building.

Be kind to everyone. It costs nothing and it's the fastest way to get remembered for the right reasons.

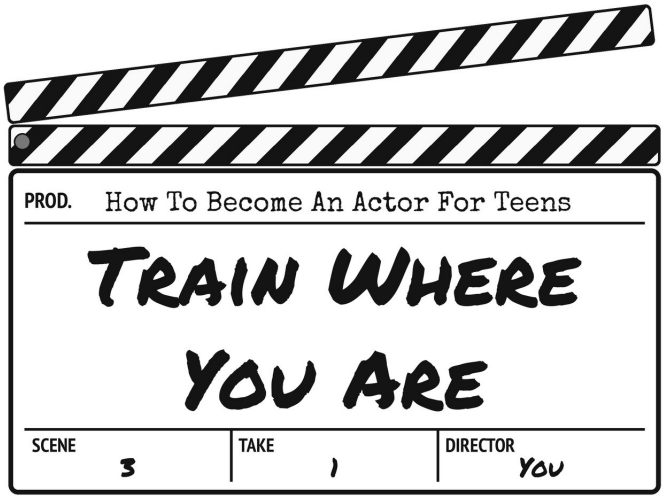
THE RULE OF THREE

In my experience, people need to meet you or see your work about three times before they remember you long term. The third time I met a casting director, they usually knew my face and often my name.

So don't give up after one audition. Keep showing up, keep doing good work, and keep a simple notebook of who you meet.

DO THIS WEEK Watch the end credits of your favourite show and find the casting director's name. Look them up. What else have they cast?

READ NEXT What does a casting director do?
A free guide at secretactor.com



Acting talent is like a muscle. It needs to be used, or it gets weak.

You don't need to live in LA to train. You need to start where you are, today.

GET ON STAGE

School plays, drama club, community theatre, youth theatre. All of it counts.

I can tell within moments whether an actor has a real theatre background. Stage teaches you to listen, to hold an audience and to keep going when something goes wrong.

PICK CLASSES IN THIS ORDER

Karen Workman, a mum of child actors, suggests teens build up to all of these over time:

1. **Improv** first, for confidence and quick thinking. Comedy casting directors look for respected improv schools on resumes.
2. **Scene study**, to learn how to break down and play a scene.
3. **Cold reading**, so you can read a scene well with very little prep.
4. **An audition class**, once real auditions are coming in.

HOW TO CHOOSE A TEACHER

- Research them, then ask to watch (audit) a class before you sign up. I suggest auditing at least three.
- Talk to the students afterwards. Do they feel safe? Are they improving?
- Choose a teacher who is encouraging but honest. A teacher who praises everything won't help you grow.
- Stay away from big egos. You'll be vulnerable in class, so you need someone you trust.

AIM TO BE IN THE BOTTOM HALF OF THE CLASS

This is one of my favourite rules. You rise to the level of your scene partners, so be in a room where others are better than you.

If you can't tell where you rank in the class, you're probably right where you need to be.

And remember, the goal isn't to reach the top level of an acting school. The goal is to be a working actor.

YOUR OTHER SKILLS COUNT

Singing, dancing, an instrument, a sport, martial arts, skateboarding, another language. Casting sometimes needs a very specific skill, and when they do, the competition shrinks.

Karen's daughter landed a union job partly because she could do archery.

Just never list a skill you can't really do. Casting will ask you to show them.

PRACTISE AT HOME, FOR FREE

- Memorise one page of dialogue every day. Aim to be off book in ten minutes.
- Read great scripts and watch great films. Notice who cast and directed them.
- Film yourself doing a scene on your phone, then watch it back.

- Run lines with a friend rather than a parent when you can. It keeps home feeling like home.

DO THIS WEEK Find two classes near you (or online) and ask if you can watch one session of each.

WATCH NEXT What acting classes should I enrol my teen in? with Karen Workman

This video is part of the Secret Actor Society educational library at secretactor.com



Your three tools, on a teen budget

Casting directors are busy. They'll usually look at your headshot first, then your resume, then your reel. Make each one quick and clear.

FIRST, KNOW YOUR TYPE

Your type is how the industry sees you at a glance. For young actors it might be the lead (charismatic, smart), the best friend or sidekick (quirky, funny, shy), or the antagonist (the bully, the mean one).

Here's how to find yours. Ask fifteen people (five who work in the industry or drama, five friends, five people who barely know you) which three actors you remind them of. Look for the pattern.

I got this wrong for years. I was marketing myself as a serious, intense type, and I wasn't getting many auditions. When I reshot my headshots to match how people actually saw me, I went from about two auditions a month to close to twenty.

Don't try to be everything to everyone. Figure out what you're great at, and lead with that.

HEADSHOTS: LOOK LIKE YOU, TODAY

- Your headshot is a promise of who will walk into the room. If it doesn't look like you, you've wasted the casting director's time.
- Keep it natural and current. Lines, freckles, braces, dimples... they're what make you human. No heavy filters or editing.
- Teens change fast, so plan to update your photos about once a year, or sooner if you change a lot.
- Never shoot a "sexy" or tough look you wouldn't want to be cast in.
- You don't need to spend a fortune. Casting directors have seen great headshots taken by a friend with a good eye. Window light and a plain wall go a long way.
- If an agency says you must use their photographer, that's a red flag.

RESUME: ONE HONEST PAGE

- Your name, your contact (your parent's or your agent's email and phone, never your home address), height, and hair and eye colour.
- Credits: school plays and youth theatre count. So do short films and student films. Never call something "just a short film". If it's on your resume, be proud of it.
- Training: list your classes and teachers.
- Special skills: only ones you can do on the spot.
- Never invent a credit. It's a tiny industry and people find out.

REEL: BEST MOMENT FIRST

Casting often decides in ten to fifteen seconds, so put your strongest moment at the very start. Keep it short. One excellent minute beats two average ones.

No footage yet? Film a two-person scene on a phone, against a plain wall, with even light and your scene partner just off camera. That's enough to start.

In my old book I wrote that a teenager with no credits and one phenomenal scene will get noticed, because most people will overlook the presentation. That's still true. A great performance beats fancy footage.

KEEP YOURSELF SAFE ONLINE

Be contactable, not stalk-able. Never put your home address, school or birth date on anything public, including your IMDb page.

DO THIS WEEK Do the fifteen-people type exercise. Write down every actor they name.

WATCH NEXT How much should headshots cost for a child actor? with Karen Workman

This video is part of the Secret Actor Society educational library at secretactor.com



When I was starting out in Australia, I missed so many opportunities simply because I didn't know where to look. Here's where to look.

WHERE REAL AUDITIONS ARE POSTED

- **Casting sites.** Kids' and teen roles are posted on the same sites as adults' roles. In the US, Actors Access (from Breakdown Services) is the essential one, and a basic profile is free. Backstage, Casting Networks and Casting Frontier are also used. Your parent sets up and runs your account.
- **Student films.** Film schools need young actors all the time. Ask the film schools near you where they find their cast. Student films usually don't pay, but they give you footage, experience and friends who will one day be directors.
- **Short films and indie projects.** Local filmmaker groups and community theatres often know who's casting.
- **Open calls.** Real open calls do exist, and they're mostly for young actors or very specific looks, languages or skills. Big studios rarely hold them. Disney, for example, casts its shows through casting directors who work mostly with agents. Its occasional official talent search is listed on Disney's own website, and it never charges a fee.

ONLY SUBMIT FOR ROLES YOU'RE RIGHT FOR

Casting directors told us they do look at actors without agents, but only when the actor actually fits the role. If the breakdown says 16 to 18 and you're 13, don't submit. It wastes their time and makes them less likely to open your next submission.

EVERY PROJECT IS A FREE CLASS

I did around fifty short and indie films before I moved to LA. Every single one taught me something about being on a set.

Think of every audition as a free class in auditioning, and every small film as a free class in film acting.

CHOOSE PROJECTS WISELY

Before you say yes, ask three questions:

1. **Is the script good?** If the script is hard to read, the film will likely be hard to watch.
2. **Who's making it, and what have they done before?** Look them up.
3. **Is it safe and well organised?** Students at established film schools, and productions with insurance and a clear schedule, are more likely to look after you.

Quality beats budget. I'd rather be in a great short film than an average feature.

THE FIVE-PEOPLE TEST

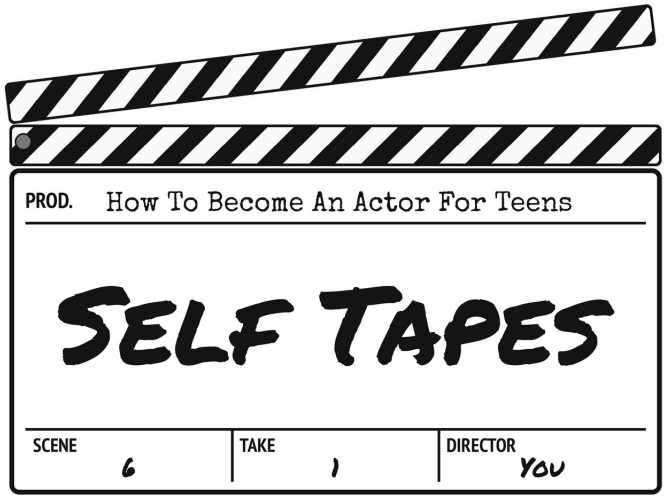
Before you film anything, especially anything that will live online, think of the five people you respect most in the world. Would you be happy for them to see it?

If not, say no. The internet is forever.

DO THIS WEEK With a parent, look up the two closest film schools to you and find out how they cast their student films.

WATCH NEXT Where can I find auditions for my child? with Karen Workman

This video is part of the Secret Actor Society educational library at secretactor.com



Self tapes from your bedroom

Most first auditions today are self tapes. You film your audition at home and send it in.

A self tape is every bit as real as an audition in the room. Treat it that way.

THE SETUP (NO FANCY GEAR NEEDED)

- **Light on your face.** Face a window, or use one soft light in front of you. No bright window behind you.
- **Plain background.** A blue, grey or plain light wall. Nothing distracting.
- **Clean sound.** A quiet room. Turn off fans and notifications.
- **Framing.** Camera at eye level on a tripod or a stack of books, filming horizontally, from about mid-chest to just above your head.
- **Your reader.** Stand them just beside the camera, so your eyes play close to the lens.

CHOOSE YOUR READER CAREFULLY

Casting directors told us a bad reader can cost you the role. One of the examples they gave was a parent reading flatly.

The best reader is quiet, steady and lets the pauses land. They're there to help you, not to perform. If you can, practise with someone from your acting class.

FOLLOW THE INSTRUCTIONS EXACTLY

Every casting office asks for things a little differently. Read the instructions twice, then do exactly what they say. Following instructions is part of the audition.

If they don't say otherwise:

- Put your best take first.
- Send one or two takes at most.
- Slate at the end, or as a separate file.

THE FIRST FEW SECONDS MATTER MOST

Casting directors may decide in 15 to 45 seconds. Make the opening count. Start in the moment, not with a long lead-in.

Make a bold, clear choice that fits the scene. Casting director Lisa London's advice is that you're your own producer on a self tape, so own it.

On kids' and teen roles, casting often wants someone fresh and natural, not over-rehearsed. Be you, in the situation.

KEEP TAPES PRIVATE

Never post a self tape on Instagram, TikTok or anywhere public. Audition scripts are often confidential, and posting them can get you in real trouble with casting.

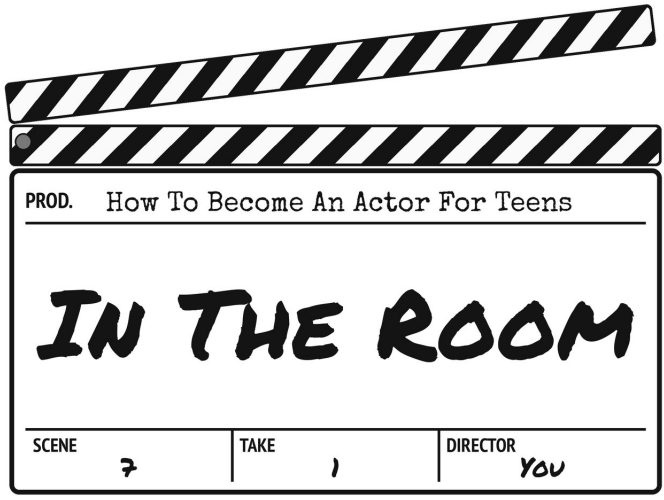
BE READY TO TAPE FAST

Sometimes you'll get a scene in the evening that's due the next day. Keep your setup easy to put together, and have a reader you can call.

DO THIS WEEK Set up your self-tape corner and film one scene. Watch it back with the sound off, then with the sound on. What do you notice?

WATCH NEXT Has a bad self-tape reader ever cost an actor a job? with casting director Sunny Boling

This video is part of the Secret Actor Society educational library at secretactor.com



An audition is like a first date. Everything is amplified.

The good news? The casting director is rooting for you. They want you to be the one, because then their search is over.

BOOK THE ROOM, NOT THE PART

Most working actors do 30 to 40 auditions for every job they book. So the real goal of each audition isn't the role. It's to make the casting director want to call you in again.

If they remember you as prepared, pleasant and talented, you've won, whether you get this part or not.

BEFORE YOU GO

- **Learn your lines.** Prepare as if it's the job. Nobody watches a fumbled audition and thinks "she'd be great if she knew her lines".
- **Do your homework.** Watch the show. Read the script if you can. Know the casting director's name.
- **Practise the scene several different ways.** Casting often gives a note to see if you can change. Be ready.

- **Dress to suggest the character.** A hint, never a costume. No props, and never anything that looks like a weapon.
- **Arrive early.** Being on time is one of the best compliments an actor can get.

YOUR SLATE

A slate is a quick hello on camera before or after you read. Usually it's your name, and sometimes your height and your agency or city. Say it in your own voice, warm and simple. No jokes or characters.

Don't say your age unless they ask. Sometimes they'll ask if you're over 18. Just answer honestly.

The golden rule: do exactly what casting asks for. Every office is a little different.

IN THE ROOM

- Get in, do your job, get out. Be relaxed, friendly and brief.
- Let the casting director lead. Match their energy.
- Keep your sides (the script pages) in your hand, even if you're off book. If you lose your place, you can find it fast.
- Don't shake hands unless they offer. It's about germs, not manners.
- It's fine to ask one smart question about the scene.
- Take the note and really change the take. Taking direction well can matter as much as the performance.
- Never touch the reader.

NEVER MAKE EXCUSES

Don't apologise. Don't say "I only got the sides last night." Don't say it's your first audition.

People are easily convinced. If you tell them it wasn't your best, they'll believe you. What you do in the room is your audition, so let the work speak for itself.

NERVES ARE NORMAL

Breathe. Stop cramming in the waiting room; by then you're ready. Many casting directors will happily let you go again if you ask.

And remember what Ben Whitehair says: you didn't have the role before you walked in, so not booking it loses you nothing.

THEN FORGET ABOUT IT

On the way home, write down three things you did well and one thing to work on. Then let it go. You can't change it, and the next audition needs your energy.

CALLBACKS

A callback means they liked you and want to see more, often with the director or producers. Bring back what got you the callback. Casting director Deborah Barylski is clear on this: they liked what you did, so do it again unless someone redirects you. Wearing the same outfit is the safe choice too.

DO THIS WEEK Practise your slate on camera ten times until it feels like you saying hello.

WATCH NEXT What would you say to a petrified actor auditioning for the first time? with casting director Meg Morman

This video is part of the Secret Actor Society educational library at secretactor.com



Agents and managers for young actors

You don't need an agent to start. You need training, a few photos, and some experience. The agent comes when you're ready to compete for bigger roles.

AGENT OR MANAGER?

- **An agent** finds you auditions and negotiates your contracts. Agents usually take 10%.
- **A manager** guides your whole career, helps you build your team and often pitches you too. Managers usually take 10 to 15%.

Both are paid only from money you earn. A real agent or manager costs nothing to sign with.

Karen Workman's tip for families who are new and unsure: a good manager can help you find the right agent. Families who already understand the business can go straight to agents.

WHEN ARE YOU READY?

Our two parent experts see this a little differently, and both have a point.

- Bonnie J Wallace, author of The Hollywood Parents Guide, says take your time and wait for a good one. A good agent beats any agent.
- Karen Workman says once you really want paid work, it's time to start looking.

Either way, get your training and your three tools sorted first.

YOUTH AGENCY OR AN ADULT AGENCY'S KIDS DIVISION?

Both can work. Choose the person who genuinely believes in you. Youth agents usually know the rules about work permits, school and protecting your earnings really well, which helps.

In my experience, what matters most is how much your particular agent believes in you. Two actors at the same agency can get very different numbers of auditions.

HOW TO FIND ONE

- **Referrals are the strongest way in.** If a teacher, casting director or another actor offers to recommend you, get your materials looking professional first. And never be upset if someone says no. They're putting their name on the line.
- **Commercial agents** are often easier to sign with at the start, and having any agent shows others that someone believes in you.
- **Check their clients.** Look up a few of their young clients on IMDb. Are they booking recent work?
- **Check they're licensed.** In California, talent agencies must be licensed by the Labor Commissioner.

THE MEETING

This is a business meeting between equals. They're deciding whether to work with you, and you're deciding whether to trust them.

Be relaxed, be yourself, and have a conversation. Reps can spot desperation a mile away.

They'll be watching your parents too. Karen says agents look for families who are organised, reliable and low drama.

If they ask you to perform a scene, pick one that fits your type. And please... don't do the scene every new actor does from the most famous film you can think of.

WORKING WITH YOUR AGENT

- Email, don't call, and only when you have real news (a new skill, a booking, new photos).
- Bad day about your career? Call a friend, not your manager.
- Many teens start talking to their reps directly around 15 or 16, with a parent copied in.

DO THIS WEEK Ask your acting teacher which agents and managers their young students are with.

WATCH NEXT When is my teen ready to get an agent? with Bonnie J Wallace
This video is part of the Secret Actor Society educational library at secretactor.com



This is the most important chapter in the book. Please read it with a parent.

Young actors and their families are a big target for scammers, because they're excited and they don't yet know how the industry works. Now you will.

THE NUMBER ONE RULE

NEVER PAY A FEE TO AUDITION, OR TO JOIN AN AGENCY OR MANAGEMENT COMPANY.

Real agents and managers earn a percentage of the work they book for you. That's it. In California, it's against the law for a talent agency to charge a registration fee. And no real casting office will ever charge you to audition.

I wrote this in capital letters in my first book and I'll say it again here, because scam youth agencies still take advantage of loving parents by charging signing fees and making them pay for photos.

RED FLAGS

IF YOU HEAR THIS...	IT'S PROBABLY A SCAM BECAUSE...
"You won our competition! Now pay to join the agency."	Real agencies don't charge to join
"You must use our photographer."	Real agents let you choose your own
"You must take our classes or workshops to be represented."	Representation is never tied to paying them
"Disney (or Netflix) is casting right now. Send money to secure your spot."	Studios cast through casting directors and never charge
A text or DM from a "scout" you've never heard of	Fake scout messages are a common trick
A "virtual open call" that turns into a sales pitch	Real auditions don't end with a bill
A site selling "real Hollywood castings" for a fee	Those are often illegally copied casting notices
Anyone asking for bank details to "hold" a role	Hang up

The US Federal Trade Commission has warned families about exactly these tricks.

CHECK BEFORE YOU TRUST

- Look up the casting director's name and credits. Real ones have real, checkable work.

- Ask a paid photographer, manager or private teacher who works with minors in California to show you their Child Performer Services permit.
- Ask a paid showcase which working actors came out of it.
- If something feels off, it probably is. You can always walk away.

RULES FOR EVERY MEETING

- Never meet anyone from the industry alone. A parent comes with you.
- Ask who will be in the room. Karen Workman's rule: a young actor should never be alone with one unfamiliar adult.
- Never meet in a private home or hotel room for an "audition".
- Never sign anything at an audition. Take it home for your parents to read.
- You never have to do anything you're not comfortable with. Not in an audition, not on set, not ever.

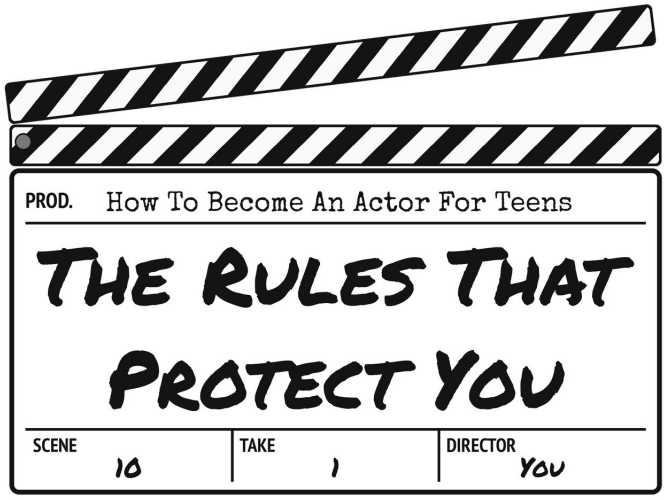
A CHILD WHO CAN SAY NO IS A SAFER CHILD

That's Karen's line, and I love it. The safest young actors are the ones whose families talk openly, and who know they're allowed to say no, leave, and tell a parent straight away.

DO THIS WEEK Sit down with a parent and agree your family's safety rules. Write them down and keep them on your phone.

WATCH NEXT What scams do parents of child actors fall for? with Karen Workman

This video is part of the Secret Actor Society educational library at secretactor.com



There are special laws for actors under 18. They exist to protect your schooling, your health and your money.

These are California's rules, where much of the US industry works, as checked in October and November 2026. Other states and countries set their own rules, so always check where the job is.

WORK PERMIT

In California, anyone under 18 needs an Entertainment Work Permit to work, and it's renewed every six months. Teens aged 14 to 17 first complete a short sexual harassment prevention training. Your school grades can affect it, so keep them up. (California Labor Commissioner)

New York has its own permit for child performers. (New York Department of Labor)

YOUR MONEY IS YOURS

Since 2000, a California minor's earnings legally belong to the minor, not the parents. (California Family Code 7500)

Under the Coogan Law, your employer puts 15% of your pay straight into a protected Coogan account. In California, that money is locked until you turn 18. California, New York, Illinois, Louisiana and New Mexico all have Coogan

rules, and you usually need the account open before you can get a work permit. (SAG-AFTRA on Coogan)

HOURS

There are strict limits on how long young actors can be on set, and they change with age. For example, an actor in the 9 to 16 age band on a school day can be on site for up to 9 hours: up to 5 hours of work, 3 of school and 1 of rest. There must be 12 hours between wrap and your next call. (California hours chart)

Because younger actors can work fewer hours, productions sometimes cast actors who are older than the character. Looking younger than your age can work in your favour.

STUDIO TEACHER

On set, a studio teacher makes sure you do your schoolwork and looks out for your wellbeing. Bring the work your own school sets you. If something worries you on set, the studio teacher is one of the people you can tell.

A PARENT NEARBY

For actors under 16 in California, a parent or guardian must be within sight or sound of you at all times on set. (California regulation 11757)

"LEGAL 18"

You might hear casting ask for "legal 18". It usually means a 16 or 17 year old who has finished high school early through a state proficiency exam, so they can work more like an adult. In California that exam is now the California Proficiency Program. You're still a minor for contracts and Coogan. It's a big decision, so talk it through with your family and your school. (California Department of Education)

THE UNION

SAG-AFTRA is the main US actors' union. You usually join after you've booked union work, and then you follow its rules. Our parent experts call joining a question of "when", not "if", for a working young actor. The union's website, not any book, is where you'll find the current rules.

DO THIS WEEK With a parent, look up the work permit rules where you live. Find the website and bookmark it.

WATCH NEXT How long can a child actor be on set legally? with Bonnie J Wallace

This video is part of the Secret Actor Society educational library at secretactor.com



Be the actor everyone wants back

You booked it! Now the real job begins.

Here's the honest truth. On a set, you're one tiny piece of a huge puzzle. A film can take years to reach its first day of shooting, and nobody has time for a diva.

I once got a role because the actress they first cast had been on set for three hours and was already being difficult. They let her go and called me.

Productions remember well-behaved young actors and bring them back. Here's how to be one of them.

THE SET RULES

1. **Be early.** Check the call sheet the night before. One of the best compliments an actor can get is "she's always on time".
2. **Running late? Tell the 2nd AD straight away.** Even ten minutes matters to a crew of dozens.
3. **Always be findable.** If you leave your trailer or holding area, tell a PA or the 2nd AD. Never wander off.

4. **Know your lines, and read every revised page.** Scripts change. I once skipped the revised pages and found out on set I'd been given two new lines.
5. **Hit your mark.** Your mark is a small T of tape on the floor. Practise walking to it without looking down.
6. **Don't touch the set.** Props are placed exactly for continuity. Leave them where they are.
7. **Let makeup and hair do their job.** Don't fix it yourself.
8. **You're an actor, not the director.** Never give other actors notes or tell the crew how to do their jobs.
9. **Assume your microphone is always on.** And never say anything bad about anyone on set... ever.
10. **Safety first.** Never handle anything that looks like a weapon unless the armourer hands it to you and explains it. If something feels unsafe, you can say no and tell your parent and the 2nd AD.

NOBODY IS ABOVE OR BELOW YOU

The production assistant (PA) getting you water today could be producing a film in a few years. Many producers started as PAs, and plenty of stars started as background actors.

Respect everyone, say thank you, and never ask a grip to get you a coffee.

WHO TO GO TO

FOR THIS...	GO TO...
Where to be and when, signing in and out	The 2nd AD
Getting from place to place, everyday questions	Your assigned PA
Schoolwork, or anything worrying you	Your studio teacher and your parent

FOR THIS...	GO TO...
A costume that doesn't fit or isn't comfortable	Wardrobe
A worry about a scene or the script	Your parent, who can talk to your agent
Anything that feels like harassment	Your parent, the studio teacher, or the intimacy coordinator if there is one

SETS AREN'T ALWAYS GLAMOROUS

Calls are early. There's a lot of waiting. The food can be pretty basic. Bring your schoolwork, a book and something warm, and be patient.

Every finished film is a little miracle. You get to be part of it.

DO THIS WEEK Learn five set words from the glossary at the back of this book.

WATCH NEXT Tips on how my teen should behave on set with Karen Workman

This video is part of the Secret Actor Society educational library at secretactor.com



You don't need a big following to book work. But people in the industry will look you up, so make sure they like what they find.

WHO'S LOOKING

- After a strong callback, someone may check your socials to see if you'd be good to work with.
- Disney looks at a teen's social media before hiring, including whether followers have been bought.
- Agents and managers look too. Chris Roe, who represents actors, says he doesn't sign actors for their follower count, whether it's 50 or 50,000.

THE SIMPLE RULES

- **Two accounts.** A public one for your acting, and a private one for close friends and family.
- **Never buy followers.** People can tell, and it can cost you work.
- **Never post self tapes or audition scripts.** They're often confidential.
- **Keep it age-appropriate.** Overly sexy or edgy posts work against a teen who wants to be taken seriously. Anything inappropriate for your age won't help you later.

- **The five-people test again.** Before you post, ask: would the five people I respect most be happy to see this?
- **Never share your address, your school or where you are right now.**
- **Let a parent help with comments and DMs.** If a stranger messages you about "an opportunity", show a parent before you reply.

WHAT TO POST

Study the accounts of young actors you respect. Share the real you: what you're learning, what you love, the things that make you interesting. Celebrate your friends' work too.

When I was a teenager, I used to ring my local newspaper and ask, "I just did this, is it worth a story?" I got two articles that way and learned an important lesson. Press and attention follow real work. Do the work, then share it.

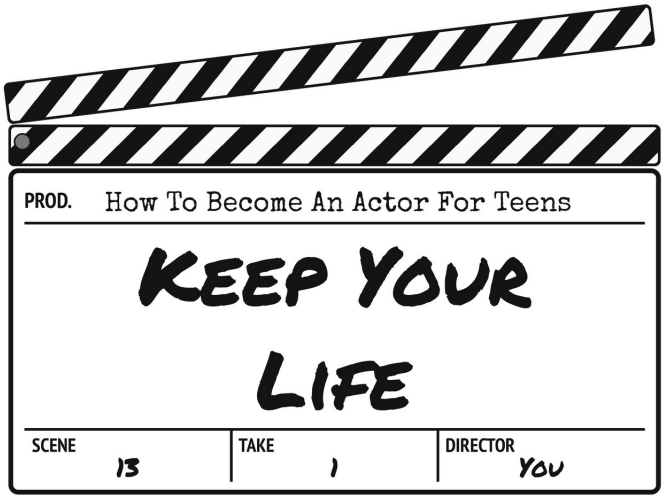
YOUR FAMILY'S PLAN

Families handle this differently. Bonnie J Wallace keeps her own account on every platform her teen uses and follows them. Karen Workman has her teens write their own social media guidelines. Pick an approach together.

DO THIS WEEK Look at your public profile as if you were a casting director. Would you hire you?

WATCH NEXT How can I protect my teen on social media? with Bonnie J Wallace

This video is part of the Secret Actor Society educational library at secretactor.com



Rejection, school and keeping your life

You'll hear "no" far more than "yes". Every actor does, including the famous ones. Here's how to stay strong and happy along the way.

REJECTION ISN'T PERSONAL

When you don't book a role, it usually has nothing to do with your talent. Maybe they needed someone taller, or someone who looked like the actor playing your mum. Maybe the role went to someone they'd worked with before.

And when a casting director doesn't call you for a while, it's not rejection either. It's like a friend who only invites you to a party when they bump into you. You just weren't top of mind that week.

Your job is to do great work, then let it go.

DEFINE SUCCESS YOUR WAY

Karen Workman puts it simply: success is doing good work, learning, and enjoying it. A young actor can go 10 or even 50 auditions without booking anything. Quiet periods are training season.

Most people who "don't make it" simply quit. If you keep learning and keep going, the odds move in your favour.

PROCRASTINATION IS FEAR IN DISGUISE

Confession: I wrote part of my first book the night before a big audition, instead of preparing for it. Why? Because if I didn't prepare, I'd have an excuse if I didn't book it.

That's what procrastination often is. A fear of doing your best and still hearing no.

Millions of people would love the audition you have. So don't take it lightly. Do the work.

SCHOOL COMES FIRST

- Auditions, more than sets, are what cause school trouble. Missed classes can drag your grades down, and poor grades can put your work permit at risk.
- Stay in your normal school unless you're already working steadily. Online or home study is something to consider only if booking work makes school impossible.
- Karen says most teen actors she knows have really good grades, because acting teaches time management.
- You can always say no to an audition. Exams matter too.

KEEP YOUR LIFE

Acting is something you do, not who you are.

Keep friends outside the industry. Keep your hobbies, your sport, family dinners and even your chores. Unique life experiences make you a deeper actor than any class ever could.

If you live somewhere without much of an industry, it's fine to keep your acting fairly quiet at school.

LOOK AFTER YOUR MIND

It's normal to feel nervous, disappointed or a bit flat sometimes. If those feelings stick around, or acting stops being fun, tell a parent or someone you trust. Talking to a counsellor or therapist, ideally one who understands the industry, is a smart and strong move.

And if you ever decide acting isn't for you anymore, that's not failure. Many young actors move on and take everything they learned with them.

DO THIS WEEK Write your own definition of success for this year. Not "get famous". Something you control, like "do four student films" or "take an improv class".

WATCH NEXT How can I care for my teen's mental health as they pursue acting? with Bonnie J Wallace

This video is part of the Secret Actor Society educational library at secretactor.com



If you're a parent reading this, thank you. Your teen's safety and happiness depend on you more than on any agent or casting director.

IT HAS TO BE THEIR DREAM

Bonnie J Wallace has a simple test: if you're pushing more than they're pulling, you've gone too far. Watch for resistance, anxiety, or the joy going out of it.

Your teen's worth has nothing to do with bookings. Be careful how you talk about bodies and looks at home.

YOUR ROLE AT AUDITIONS

- Wait outside unless casting asks you in. Casting directors notice parents in the waiting room, so be calm and friendly.
- Ask who will be in the room. Your teen should never be alone with one unfamiliar adult.
- As they get older, Karen Workman started dropping her kids off to sign in themselves, while staying close by.
- Don't give performance notes at home. Leave that to their teacher.

YOUR ROLE ON SET

- In California, a parent or guardian of an under-16 must be within sight or sound at all times. Stay close, but out of the way.
- Don't direct your teen, lobby for a bigger role, hand out headshots or help yourself to the crew's food.
- The best stage parents are the ones the crew barely notices. Karen has seen children lose jobs because of how a parent behaved.
- For jobs out of town, productions usually fly and house one parent.

PAPERWORK AND MONEY

- Get the work permit and the Coogan account sorted before the first booking. (See Principle 10.)
- Commission comes only out of money your teen has earned. Never up front.
- Set a yearly budget for classes, photos and casting profiles. Try one thing at a time.
- In California your teen's earnings legally belong to them. Treat it as their money. Karen's family splits it into savings, giving, classes and fun money.
- Let the agent negotiate contracts. Read everything before you sign, and never sign at an audition.

BOUNDARIES

Agree as a family, before auditions come in, what kinds of material your teen will and won't do. Tell your agent. Research the director's past work before you say yes.

The experts in our library don't all agree on things like wrap parties or teens moving to LA without a parent. Talk to your teen about where your family stands.

KEEP HOME A SAFE PLACE

Open conversations, and permission to say no, are the best protection your teen can have. Meet their teachers yourself. Make sure they know they can tell you anything, any time, with no trouble.

> **WATCH NEXT** As the parent, what are my duties on set? with Bonnie J Wallace, and What do agents look for in parents of child performers? with Karen Workman
>
> *This video is part of the Secret Actor Society educational library at secretactor.com*



You don't need to do all of this at once. Tick things off as you go.

MONTH 1: LEARN AND TRAIN

- ☐ Write down why you want to act (Hi, I'm Kym)
- ☐ Agree your family's safety rules with a parent (Principle 9)
- ☐ Watch two acting classes, then sign up for one (Principle 3)
- ☐ Join a school play, drama club or youth theatre
- ☐ Memorise one page of dialogue a day
- ☐ Do the fifteen-people type exercise (Principle 4)

MONTH 2: BUILD YOUR TOOLS

- ☐ Get simple, natural headshots that look like you today
- ☐ Write your one-page resume, with a parent's email, never your address
- ☐ Set up your self-tape corner and film three practice scenes (Principle 6)
- ☐ With a parent, set up a casting profile on a legitimate site (Principle 5)
- ☐ Look up the work permit rules where you live (Principle 10)
- ☐ Check your social media with the five-people test (Principle 12)

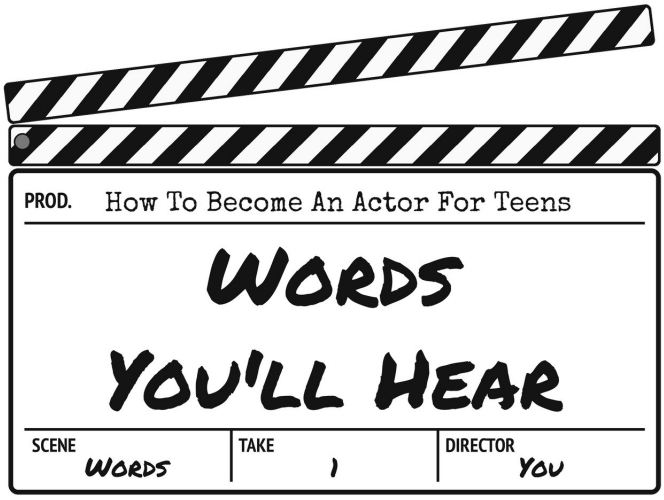
MONTH 3: GET OUT THERE

- ☐ Submit for student films and short films you're right for
- ☐ Do at least one audition or self tape, then write three things you did well
- ☐ Practise your slate until it feels natural (Principle 7)
- ☐ Start a casting notebook: who you met, where, what you read, what they said
- ☐ Learn ten set words from the glossary
- ☐ Re-read why you want to act, and write your definition of success for this year

WHEN YOU'RE READY FOR MORE

- ☐ Footage from a few projects for a short reel, best moment first
- ☐ Start looking for an agent or manager, with your parents (Principle 8)
- ☐ Work permit and Coogan account ready before your first paid job

It's a long game. Every box you tick is a step... and every step counts.



WORD	WHAT IT MEANS
Action	The director's signal to start acting
Background	Extras who fill the scene. "Background action" means they start moving
Beat	A short pause, about a second and a half
Blocking	Working out where everyone moves in a scene
Breakdown	The casting notice describing a role
Call sheet	Tomorrow's schedule: who's needed, where and when
Call time	The time you must arrive
Callback	A second audition, often for the director or producers
Cheat	Shift slightly toward camera while it still looks natural
Cold read	Reading a scene with little or no preparation
Continuity	Doing the same actions at the same moments in every take, so shots match
Co-star	A small speaking role on a TV episode

WORD	WHAT IT MEANS
Coogan account	A protected account where 15% of a young actor's pay is saved
Cut	Stop acting, the take is over
First team / second team	The actors / their stand-ins
Guest star	A bigger role on one or more TV episodes
Holding	Where actors wait between scenes
Hot set	A set ready to shoot. Don't touch anything
Mark	A small T of tape showing where you stand
Master	A wide shot that covers the whole scene
Moving on	That scene is done, on to the next
Off book	You know your lines without the script
Reel	A short video of your best acting moments
Self tape	An audition you film at home
Sides	The script pages for your audition or scene
Slate	A quick hello on camera with your name
Speed / rolling	Sound and camera are recording
Stand-in	Someone who stands in your spot while lights are set
Take	One recorded try of a shot
Wrap	The end of filming for the day, or for the whole project

WANT TO ACT?
START HERE.

Thirteen simple principles from working actress Kym Jackson, with advice from the casting directors, agents and parent experts of Secret Actor Society.

- How the industry really works
- Training, headshots and self tapes on a teen budget
- Finding real auditions, and spotting the scams
- The rules that protect young actors on set
- A chapter for parents and a 90-day checklist



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