

SAG-AFTRA MEMBERSHIP

For more info, check the SAG-AFTRA website here: http://servicesagaaftra.custhelp.com/app/answers/detail/a_id/611/~/what-are-the-eligibility-requirements-for-sag-aftra-membership%3F

There is no more prestigious performing union than the Screen Actor's Guild. When people say, "are you union?" it is SAG they are talking about. Founded in 1933, SAG-AFTRA represents approximately 160,000 professional actors. SAG-AFTRA's jurisdiction is all feature films, television commercials, television shows, radio, and broadcast news. The union also has contracts for short films, music videos, and web-based (aka "new media") projects.

In 2012, SAG (Screen Actor's Guild) merged with AFTRA (American Federation of Television and Radio Artists). This merger was very controversial and the details are still being worked out today. Since union contracts are only negotiated every few years, there are still some "legacy" contracts out there that were just SAG or just AFTRA. There is not standard contract that applies to all projects. The health plans have been merged, but the pension plans still have not.

When to Join

If you want to be a professional actor, SAG-AFTRA membership should definitely be on your agenda. The trick for kids is to *time* that joining to their best advantage. There is strategy involved here, for kids more than anyone else!

For kids, being SAG-AFTRA is not as much of a hiring advantage as it is for adults. That's because the union does not claim something called "preference of employment" for minors in most of its contracts.

There are lots of considerations to WHEN you join, including

- *where you live (if you are in a right-to-work state, you may never HAVE to join),*
- *if you plan to work in California or NY (both union states),*
- *if you have enough resume credits to compete in a professional market,*
- *if you are truly ready to leave the non-union world behind, and*
- *if you have enough money to pay.*

Once you join, there is no going back, so make sure to choose carefully.

For most kids, the best strategy is to save the money from your first few jobs so that you have enough to pay SAG-AFTRA immediately if you have to. Keep it in a liquid savings account. Then wait until SAG sends your child a "must join" letter. In other words, stall as long as you can, but be prepared.

While you may choose to join before this age, SAG-AFTRA requires kids to join after age 4 for principals and after age 14 for background players.

Taft-Hartley

"Taft Hartley" refers to a federal law passed in 1947. It is not exclusive to SAG-AFTRA, but was written to encourage free employment, the idea that anyone could get a job, not just union members. In SAG, when you are "Taft-Hartleyed" it means that a Casting Director chose to hire you, a *non-union* person, for a principal job on their union project. They have to file a short form explaining to the union why they didn't hire one of the 160,000 union members. In other words, they have to make an excuse. Theoretically, if their excuse is not good enough, SAG can fine them (the fine is about \$500). For kids, fines are rarely, if ever, imposed.

Once a CD does this, and hires you for the job, your 30 day "Taft Hartley period" starts. During that 30 days, you can work as many jobs, union or non-union as you can get in, without having to join. At the end of 30 days, you must join SAG if you want to continue working union jobs.

Occasionally, SAG has been known to extend this 30 day period and clear actors for additional SAG work. This is called an "OK30" (as in..they are OK'd for another 30 days). You can't count on this though, so make sure you have your initiation fee ready once you get into the "Taft-Hartley" zone.

How to Join

There are three ways to join SAG-AFTRA:

1. Book a principal job in a union film, show, commercial or even a new media project (yes, you can produce your own!)
2. Gather 3 UNION background vouchers (make sure they say UNION on them)
3. Join a sister union (aka the Four As), work a principal job for them, then wait one year as a member in good standing of that union. Then you can join SAG-AFTRA if you want to.

Check your **SAG-AFTRA eligibility** online here: <https://www.sagaftra.org/content/how-join-sag>

If you are **SAG Eligible** (otherwise known as “SAGe”) that means that you have already met the requirements to join but have not yet paid the dues. SAGe is the place to be! Many children use this SAGe status as the “golden time” when they can easily be cast in SAG projects, but they can also do non-union work to build up their resume.

“**Must Join**” is slang for the idea that you can’t do any more SAG-AFTRA work without joining. Meaning, you’ve already met the requirements for membership, and your 30 day Taft-Hartley period is over (see above) The next SAG job you are offered will require a quick payment to SAG-AFTRA.

Cost of Membership

Initiation fee (one time): \$3,000 plus the semi-annual basic dues payment of \$107.16 = \$3,107.16. Fees may be lower if you work in a smaller market.

Ongoing: The base dues of \$107.16 are paid twice a year, in October and April. You will owe that amount plus 1.575% of your earnings.

Union credit unions offer installment plans, and at least two of the actor credit unions offer initiation loans at about 6% interest. Check the SAG-AFTRA website for links to the financial institutions. A

Responsibilities of Membership: “Global Rule One”

The number one rule of union membership, and it is printed on your membership card, is that YOU MAY NOT DO NON-UNION WORK. Ever. There are no exceptions to this, so make sure that when you join, you are committed to the organization and ready to leave the non-union world behind.

Benefits of Membership

SAG-AFTRA has more benefits available to young performers than any other union, but that isn't saying much. They at least try to include young members when they can. A full list of SAG member benefits is here:

<http://www.sag.org/content/member-benefits>

Some of the benefits most used by young performers are health insurance (not for the parents though... only kids), SAG Conservatory, SAG Foundation free workshops, free movies at awards season, college scholarships from SAG, AFTRA and from UnionPlus, and discounts on things like IMDb Pro.

How to Leave

Kids grow up and do other things! There are two ways to leave the union, and they are available for very different purposes:

Honorary Withdrawal: This is for actors who are no longer seeking work, such as a child actor who is leaving to go to college. This is a perfectly acceptable, HONORABLE way to leave the union. You will no longer need to pay the base dues, but you will owe them on residuals you receive. To do this, you simply write a letter to SAG requesting honorary withdrawal status. If you want to re-join at a later date, it's no problem.

Financial Core: This is a very anti-union action and you need to understand the weight of this decision. For more on Financial Core, please read all the articles the Bizparentz website.

WARNING: if your child decides to leave the business, do NOT just stop paying SAG dues. If your child ever wants to pursue acting again, you are setting them up for a big bill since they may have to pay initiation fees all over again! Do it the right way...it's just a letter to request Honorary Withdrawal status.