

The Child Sex Offender Disclosure Scheme information for applicants

Information on the application process for the Child Sex Offender Disclosure Scheme, also known as “Sarah’s Law”, including how to apply, what to expect, and how to access further information and support to safeguard children.

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The Child Sex Offender Disclosure Scheme

The Child Sex Offender Disclosure Scheme (CSODS) lets you ask the police whether someone who has access to a child has a conviction for a child sex offence.

It is not a law, but the scheme is often known as “Sarah’s Law” after Sarah Payne, the victim of a high-profile murder in 2000.

CSODS does not replace the [Disclosure and Barring Service \(DBS\)](#) checks for employees. For more information, please see:

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service

How the scheme helps

Child sexual abuse is an horrific crime that has a devastating impact on victims’ lives. [The Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse](#) estimates that 15% of girls and 5% of boys experience some form of sexual abuse before the age of 16.¹

There is a common myth that most sex offences are carried out by strangers. In fact, the vast majority of child sex offenders are known by the victim and often they are a friend or family member.

If you are worried about someone’s behaviour towards a child, you can use CSODS to ask the police if they have any previous convictions for child sex offences or pose a known risk for some other reason.

If a child is in immediate danger, call 999. For non-emergency support, you can visit your local police station in person, visit your local force website, or call 101.

¹ Karsna, K., Kelly, L (2021). ‘The scale and nature of child sexual abuse: Review of evidence’. Available at: www.csacentre.org.uk/documents/scale-nature-review-evidence-0621.

Who can apply?

Anyone can make an application under CSODS, not just a child's parents or carers. This includes people like a grandparent, neighbour, or friend.

No matter who makes the application, if there is some information the police decide to share, they will tell whoever is best placed to keep the child safe. This might not be the person who made the application; it might be someone else (like the child's parents) instead.

Outside of the CSODS process, the police may share information to help keep children safe through other procedures like the [Multi-agency public protection arrangements \(MAPPA\)](#). For more information on MAPPA, please see www.gov.uk/government/publications/multi-agency-public-protection-arrangements-mappa-guidance

How to apply and what will happen

Step 1

Contact your local police force by telephone, at a police station, or online. You can find your local police force website here: www.police.uk/put/contact-the-police/uk-police-forces

Step 2

Fill in an enquiry form sharing the details of the child and individual you are enquiring about, and your basic details.

Step 3

The police will run initial checks within 24 hours to check whether urgent action is needed to protect the child.

If at any stage the police decide that there is an immediate risk of harm to a child, they will take urgent action to keep the child safe. The police still have a duty to investigate any crimes which are alleged during a CSODS application. However, it is possible for a CSODS application to run at the same time alongside a criminal investigation.

At this time, the police will agree a safe way to communicate with you.

Step 4

Within 10 days, you will need to either attend a face-to-face meeting or have a detailed phone/video call conversation. This is to make sure that your request is genuine and to find out more details. At this stage you will be asked to provide:

1. proof of your identity and address;
2. proof of your relationship to the child you are asking about.

Ideally you will be able to show 2 forms of identification which could include:

- passport;
- driving licence;
- other trusted form of photo identification;
- household utility bill (electricity, council tax, gas, water); and/or
- bank statement.

A birth certificate or personal child health record (red book) could be used to prove your relationship to the child. If you do not have these forms of identification, that will not necessarily stop you making an application. Speak to the police to work out a solution. It may be possible, for example, for someone else (like a social worker or health visitor) to confirm your or the child's identity.

The police cannot tell you anything under CSODS if they cannot confirm your identity, or if you choose to remain anonymous. This does not mean the police will ignore your concerns. They will still take whatever action is needed to keep a child safe.

You will not be told anything about the person you are applying about at this stage. You will be given more information about the scheme and general information on keeping the child safe.

Step 5

The police will carry out a full risk assessment where they will run more detailed checks on the person you are asking about and will work with other people like social services to find out more.

If the police think they are likely to share some information, they will normally speak to the person you have asked about at this point, unless they have a reason to think this is not appropriate. If a disclosure does take place the subject may be informed that someone is going to receive a disclosure about them, but this will only be done after an assessment of whether it is safe to do so. The police will discuss this with you.

Step 6

If the police decide it is appropriate to share some information, they will tell whoever is best placed to protect the child. This may not be the person who made the application in the first place. For example, if a grandparent made the application, the information may be given to a parent instead.

If there is no previous record of sexual offences against children, and the person does not pose any known risks to the child, then no information will be shared.

It is important to remember that keeping children safe is an ongoing process and, even if no information is shared, it does not necessarily mean that there is no risk of harm to the child. You should continue to keep the child safe by following the advice given.

Step 7

If the police plan to share any information with you, you will be asked to sign an agreement promising not to tell anyone else. The police will not share any information with you if you do not sign this confidentiality agreement.

Information will only be given to you so you can take steps to protect the child. You must not share the information further. If there are other people you feel should know, whether your family or other people who the subject has contact with, tell the police and they will deal with it.

The police may take action against you if the information you receive is shared further without their consent.

The maximum time scale for completion of the enquiry is 28 days from start to finish.

Advice and support

[Stop it now](http://www.stopitnow.org.uk) - Stop It Now! provides support and information to adults to help them create safer communities and protect children from sexual abuse.

www.stopitnow.org.uk

[Parents Protect](http://www.parentsprotect.co.uk) - Parents Protect helps parents and carers protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation by providing child safety resources.

www.parentsprotect.co.uk

[CEOP](http://www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre) – The Child Exploitation and Online Protection command (CEOP) is a law enforcement agency to help keep children and young people safe from sexual abuse and grooming online. www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre

[NSPCC](http://www.nspcc.org.uk) - The NSPCC provides information on preventing abuse and recognising the signs of abuse, as well as offering support to those affected by abuse.

www.nspcc.org.uk

[Barnardo's](http://www.barnardos.org.uk/) – Barnardo's supports children and young people who have experienced sexual abuse, to make them safe and help them recover. www.barnardos.org.uk/

[Stop Abuse Together](http://www.stopabusettogether.campaign.gov.uk) – This website contains information and links for anyone concerned about child sexual abuse. www.stopabusettogether.campaign.gov.uk

[Marie Collins Foundation](http://www.mariecollinsfoundation.org.uk/) – The Marie Collins Foundation is a charity that works directly with children, young people and families to support their recovery following sexual abuse involving technology. www.mariecollinsfoundation.org.uk/

Frequently Asked Questions

Will the police investigate more fully if there is more than one report about the same individual?

The police investigate every enquiry fully. If more than one person enquires about the same individual, the investigation checks will be made again and questions may be asked about why different people are making enquiries about the same individual. As part of the scheme, full details are taken from every applicant requesting that the police check a specific individual out. This will help the police detect any malicious use of the system.

Will the individual I am asking about know they are being investigated?

No, unless a decision is made to disclose. In such cases, the police will make the individual aware that a disclosure is being made unless it is not appropriate to do so. The police will discuss this with you.

Will the individual I am asking about know I started the investigation?

No, your confidentiality will be maintained unless it is decided that a disclosure should be made. If a disclosure does take place the subject may be informed that someone is going to receive a disclosure about them, but this will only be done after an assessment of whether it is safe to do so. The police will discuss this with you.

Will the individual investigated have any sort of record just because I've asked about them?

The police will keep a record of the enquiry. However, it should be noted that this is NOT a criminal record of any kind. It will allow police to identify if a pattern develops in relation to a particular individual.

You mention safeguarding children procedures. Does this mean my child can be taken away from me?

Children are only ever removed from their families in rare circumstances where they face a risk of serious harm if they remain in that environment. This is a scheme to help parents, carers or guardians better safeguard their children. Children will not be taken away from the family home if the parent, carer or guardian works with the police, children's services and other relevant agencies to safeguard their child or children against any risk identified.