

# Keeping Children Safe

**Your Right To Ask**

## The Child Sex Offender Disclosure Scheme



West Mercia  
**POLICE**



SERVING - PROTECTING - MAKING THE DIFFERENCE

**There is a scheme running in this area which gives members of the public – whether they are a parent, carer, guardian or another interested party – a formal mechanism to make enquiries about individuals who are in contact with children.**

**If police checks show that the individual has a record for child sexual offences, or other offences that might put the child at risk, the police will consider sharing this information with the person(s) best placed to protect the child, usually the parent, carer or guardian.**

## 1. How will this scheme do more to protect children? I thought anyone working with children had to be checked for child sexual offences?

This scheme enables any person to request information about people involved in children's lives if they are concerned that he or she might be a child sexual offender – for example, if a single mother wants to find out more about her new boyfriend. It does not replace checks done by the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB).

## 2. How does this scheme help?

The aim of the scheme is to give parents, carer, guardians and other interested parties a more formal mechanism for requesting information about an individual who has contact with their child or a child close to them if they are concerned that the individual is a child sexual offender. Your local police force will discuss your concerns with you and decide whether it is appropriate for you to be given more information to help protect the child involved.

Around a quarter of child sexual offences are carried out by strangers. The majority of child sexual offenders are known to their victims. They are often someone who has some form of access to a child e.g. a member of the family, a friend of the victim, or a friend of the victim's family. This is why this scheme may allow you to better protect a child from harm.

### 3. Who can ask for disclosure?

Disclosure is the sharing of specific information about an offender with a third person for the purposes of protecting children.

- anyone can make an application about a person who has contact with a child or children which means they could pose a risk of harm to that child or children. The police will discuss the type of contact this person has (or may have) with the applicant;
- any concerned third party such as a grandparent, neighbour or friend can make an application not just the parent, carer or guardian;
- however, a third party person making an application would not necessarily receive information about the individual concerned as it may be more appropriate for someone else to receive it such as the parent, carer or guardian;
- information will only be given to a person who is in a position to use the information to safeguard the child or children.

## 4. How are registered child sexual offenders usually managed?

Across the country, the police work with a range of other agencies to manage Registered Sex Offenders under the Multi-agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPAs).

MAPPAs are the arrangements through which the police, probation and prison services work together with other agencies to manage the risks posed by violent offenders and sexual offenders living in the community in order to protect the public.

The police already proactively disclose information. Information held by MAPPA agencies can be given to another person or a group of people in order to protect them from an offender, or for them to protect others. For example, leisure centre staff might be alerted where a local offender is felt to pose a risk to those using the centre. The difference with this scheme is that it provides a more formal mechanism for anyone to ask about information on an individual who has contact with a child, and for the police to deal with this request. It may also alert them that a registered sex offender may be having contact with a child or showing other worrying behaviour of which they had previously been unaware.

## How do I make an application?

It is important to remember that anyone can make an application to the police about an individual who has contact with a child or children.

### Contacting the police

There are many different ways to contact the police.

You can:

- visit a police station;
- phone the non-emergency telephone number for the police (unless you believe there is an immediate risk of harm to a child. Then you should call 999);
- speak to a member of the police on the street.

Your police force may also offer other ways of contacting them. They will advertise these locally.

## Step One: Initial contact with the police

When you have contacted the police, you will then be asked to fill in a form with a police officer or a member of police staff giving details of what prompted your enquiry and whether the individual has unsupervised contact with the child or children you are concerned about.

You will also need to give your name, address and date of birth. At a later stage you will need to provide proof of your identity.

The police will run some initial checks of their databases based on the information you have provided and conduct an initial risk assessment.

The purpose of these checks is for police to establish if there are any immediate concerns.

**If the police believe the child is at risk and in need of protection from harm, they will take immediate action.**

No disclosure of information will take place at this stage unless it is necessary for the immediate protection of a child or children.

These checks will not be undertaken while you are present.

## Step Two: Face to face meeting to complete the application

Depending on the outcome of step 1, you will be required to participate in a face to face meeting. This will be to establish further details about the application in order to assess any risk and for you to provide proof of your identity. This should comprise a photo ID (however, if photo ID is not available, the police will consider other forms of ID).

You will also need to provide documentation that shows your relationship to the child in question (if applicable). Ideally, you will need to show two forms of identification (one of which should be a photo ID if you have one).

These can be:

- your passport;
- your driving licence;
- a household utility bill;
- your bank statement;
- your benefit book; or
- your birth certificate.

If appropriate, to establish your relationship with the child you will need to show one of the following:

- the child's birth certificate;
- the child's passport; or
- the child's benefit book.

## Step Two: continued

If applicable, the police will run more detailed checks and work with other agencies including Children's Services, MAPPA and the Probation Service and undertake a further assessment of risk based on any new information received.

They will work as quickly as possible to complete the checks but, in rare circumstances, some checks may take longer for the results to be received by the police force requesting them.

It is recommended that the maximum time it should take to complete the investigation, including the possible disclosing of information to the most appropriate person, is 45 days but even then there may be some delays due to factors beyond the control of the police.

**The police will act immediately if at any point during the investigation a child is considered to be at risk and in need of protection from harm.**

## Step Three: Multi-agency meeting to consider disclosure

The police and other agencies will meet to discuss the information that you have given to them and also the information they may have received from the checks they have run. It will be decided at this meeting whether any disclosure is lawful, necessary and proportionate and in the interests of protecting the child or children from harm.

## Step Four: Potential disclosure

The police will contact you once they have carefully considered whether any information they hold could be used by you to protect a child.

They will either:

- a. contact you in person (the police will visit you, invite you to the station or arrange with you a suitable place to meet); or
- b. contact you by letter (this will only happen if there is no information for the police to provide you with), and you have previously agreed to be contacted by letter.

### What kind of information might be given

If the checks show that the individual you are asking about has a record for child sexual offences or other information that indicates they pose a risk of serious harm to the child, the police may disclose this to the person who is most able to protect the child. It should be noted that details about a person's previous convictions are treated as confidential and that the police will disclose information only if it is lawful, necessary and proportionate to do so in the interests of protecting a child from harm.

If the individual enquired about does not have a record of child sexual offences or any other information indicating that they pose a risk of serious harm to the child, then there won't be any information given because there is nothing to disclose.

It may be the case that the individual you are asking about is not known to the police for child sexual offences or other information that indicates they pose a risk of harm to children **but** they are showing worrying behaviour. In this case the police will work with you to protect the child and will provide advice and support.

### Important note

You should be aware that police checks are not a guarantee of safety because not all child sexual offenders are known to the police through being arrested or convicted of a sexual offence against a child. The police will give you advice on how to protect children and how to recognise warning signs of abuse in both children and individuals that are in contact with children. They will also make sure you are aware of what local and national support is available.

### After you are given information

Can I tell my family and friends about this? I really need to talk to someone.

If you do receive information from the police it should be treated as confidential. It is only being given to you so that you can take steps to protect your children. You must not share this information with anyone else unless you have spoken to the police, or person who gave you the information, and they have agreed with you how it will be shared.

Subject to the condition that the information is kept confidential, you can:

- use the information to keep yourself and others safe;
- use the information to keep your children safe;
- ask what support is available;
- ask who you should contact if you think other children may be at risk; and
- ask for advice on how to keep yourself and others safe.

The police may decide not to give you information if they think that you will discuss it with others.

The police may take action against you if the information is disclosed without their consent, which could include civil or criminal proceedings. You should be aware that it is an offence (under Section 55 of the Data Protection Act 1998) for a person to 'knowingly or recklessly obtain or disclose personal data without the consent of the data controller' which in this case is usually the police.

**If nothing was found on the searches, but this has made you think about protecting your child there is action you can take to protect your child or children in the future.**

The police will provide you with information and advice on how to protect your child(ren) and how to recognise warning signs of abuse in both children and individuals that are in contact with children. There are also a number of support groups providing information about child sexual abuse, how to spot it and how to work with the authorities to intervene.

The applicant can also keep in regular contact with the police. Even if a subject doesn't have a record for child sexual offences it doesn't mean that he or she is not potentially a risk and likewise, even if on this occasion the police have no information to give, you should still take appropriate steps to safeguard your children.

## Support helplines

### Stop it Now! 0808 1000 900/help@stopitnow.co.uk

Stop it Now! is a **confidential helpline** for adults worried about the sexual behaviour of people they know towards children, including parents and carers worried about the sexual behaviour of their children. The helpline also engages with those worried about their own sexual thoughts or behaviour towards children as well as with professionals needing help with difficult cases.

**This confidential helpline operates from 9am – 9pm Monday to Thursday and from 9am – 7pm on Friday.**  
[www.stopitnow.org.uk](http://www.stopitnow.org.uk)

### NSPCC Child Protection Helpline: 0808 800 5000

**If you think a child is in immediate danger, call the police on 999.**

If you're worried about a child's safety or welfare or if you need help or advice, ring our helpline on 0808 800 5000. We can provide help by email, with response within 24 hours. If you are emailing us from Northern Ireland, please email [talk@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:talk@nspcc.org.uk).

From the rest of the UK please email [help@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:help@nspcc.org.uk)

- Textphone: 0800 056 0566
- Asian Helpline service in English: 0800 096 7719
- Bengali/Sylehti: 0800 096 7714
- Cymru/Wales: 0808 100 2524
- Gujarati: 0800 096 7715
- Hindi: 0800 096 7716
- Punjabi: 0800 096 7717
- Urdu: 0800 096 7718

## Example scenarios

### Scenario 1:

**“I’m a single mum and I’ve got a new partner. I don’t know very much about his past and I want to check if there is any information I need to be aware of. What can I do?”**

You can ask the police to investigate whether your partner has a record for child sexual offences. If it turns out that your partner has a record for child sexual offences, and the individual is thought to be a serious risk to your children, the police will take appropriate action to protect you and your children. This may include disclosure of information to you. If the investigation does not reveal any record of child sexual offences, but there are other reasons which mean the police might be worried about the safety of your children – for example, if the individual has a record of violent offending – the police may also take steps to safeguard your family which may include considering disclosure of the convictions. If at any time the police are concerned about the immediate safety of your children, or you, they will act very quickly to protect you.

### Scenario 2:

**“My daughter’s new boyfriend wants to look after her child all the time – so much so that I never see my grandson any more. I’m worried. It doesn’t feel normal. Is there anything I can do?”**

Interested third parties such as family and friends can also make an application to the police under the scheme. However, if police checks show that an individual has a record for child sexual offences, or other offences that might put a child at risk, the police will take appropriate action but disclosure may not be made to you. Instead the police will consider sharing this information with the person(s) best placed to protect the child, which in this case, is likely to be your daughter.

### Scenario 3:

**“I don’t like the look of my neighbour and she is rude to me. Can I check her out?”**

Not unless you are concerned about your neighbour’s relationship with certain children. The police will want to know on what grounds you want to check out your neighbour, and which children he or she has contact with. The police also have a duty to explore why an enquiry is being made to ensure that it is not malicious.

## Frequently Asked Questions

**Q1. You mention safeguarding children procedures. Does this mean my child can be taken away from me?**

**A1.** 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.

**Q2. Will the police investigate more fully if there is more than one report about the same individual?**

**A2.** 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.

**Q3. Will the individual I am asking about know they are being investigated?**

**A3.** 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.

**Q4. Will the individual I am asking about know I started the investigation?**

**A4.** No, your confidentiality will be maintained unless it is decided that a disclosure should be made. In this case, the individual may be informed that you are to receive information 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.

**Q5. Will the individual investigated have any sort of record just because I've asked about them?**

**A5.** The police will keep a record of the enquiry. However, It should be noted that this is NOT a criminal record of any kind but it will allow police to identify if a pattern develops in relation to a particular individual.

This is a Home Office scheme carried out by Police Forces in England managed in association with the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), the Department for Education (DfE), and the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) with advice gratefully received from NSPCC, NCH, Barnardos, Sara Payne and Lucy Faithfull Foundation: Stop it Now!

# policing west mercia

You can submit a disclosure request to West Mercia Police by letter, phone, through the force website, at a police station or by speaking to a police officer.

Your request will be managed by specialist officers who work in the force's Public Protection Unit. They will contact you once your request has been recorded on the force's database.

## Key Contact Details:

- Non-emergency Number: 0300 333 3000
- West Mercia Police website: [www.westmercia.police.uk](http://www.westmercia.police.uk)
- West Mercia Police, Public Protection Unit, Hindlip Hall, PO Box 55, Worcester, WR3 8SP

We will require information about you, the child you believe may be at risk and the person you are concerned about.

**If you think a child is in immediate danger call 999 at any time. Your concern will be dealt with under existing child protection arrangements.**

Policing Herefordshire, Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin and Worcestershire