



SAFEGUARDING, DISCLOSURE & PERSONAL SAFETY

Sarah's Law

Understanding the Child Sex Offender Disclosure Scheme, who can apply, what police check, and what happens next.

The key idea

Sarah's Law is the common name for the Child Sex Offender Disclosure Scheme. Anyone with a concern can ask police about a specific person who has contact with a specific child or children; any disclosure is made to protect the child.

What is Sarah's Law?

Sarah's Law is the commonly used name for the **Child Sex Offender Disclosure Scheme (CSODS)**. It provides a formal route for asking police whether a specific person who has contact with a specific child or children has a record for child sexual offences or is known to pose a risk for another reason.

It is not actually a law

Despite its familiar name, Sarah's Law is a **disclosure scheme**, not a separate Act of Parliament. It provides a structured way for police to use existing powers to share information where disclosure is necessary and proportionate to protect a child.

Who can apply?

Anyone who is worried about somebody's behaviour towards a child can apply. You do not have to be the child's parent or carer. An applicant might be a grandparent, relative, neighbour, friend or another person with a genuine safeguarding concern.

Specific person + specific child

The scheme is not a public list of people with sexual-offence convictions. An application must relate to a **specific person** and a **specific child or children** with whom that person has contact.

Who receives the information?

The person who makes the application is not automatically the person who receives any disclosure. If police decide information should be shared, it is given to the person or people considered best placed to use it to protect the child.

The purpose is safeguarding

The central question is not simply whether information exists. Police consider whether sharing information is needed to protect the child and whether the disclosure would be lawful and proportionate.

How to make an application

Current Police.uk guidance allows applications online. You can also call **101** or visit a local police station. You will be asked about yourself, the person you are concerned about, the child or children involved and why you are worried.

Useful information to have

- As much identifying information as you know about the person you are asking about.
- Details of the child or children you are concerned about.
- Your relationship to the child and why you are making the request.
- The behaviour, circumstances or information that caused your concern.
- Safe contact details for the police to use.

You do not need every detail

Police.uk says it is okay if you do not know all of the requested identifying information. Give as much accurate information as you can rather than guessing.

This is not the route for reporting abuse

A Sarah's Law application asks police for information about somebody. If you believe a child is being abused, has disclosed abuse, or is currently at risk, report the safeguarding concern directly rather than relying on the disclosure process.

Immediate danger

If a child or anybody else is in immediate danger, call **999**. For non-emergency police contact, call **101** or use your local police force's reporting routes.

What happens after you apply?

Police.uk sets out a staged process. Initial checks should be made within **24 hours**, and police will act immediately if they believe a child is in immediate danger. If the application progresses, a more detailed interview should usually take place within **10 days**.

Identity checks

At the in-depth interview, police normally need to confirm your identity, address and relationship to the child. If standard documents are unavailable, Police.uk advises discussing this with the force because another professional may sometimes help confirm identity.

The full assessment

Police carry out more detailed checks and may work with organisations such as social care, probation and health services. Information supplied in the application may be shared with partner agencies where this is needed for safeguarding and assessment.

How long can it take?

Current Police.uk guidance says the maximum period from the initial enquiry to a disclosure, or notification that there is nothing to share, should be **45 days**. Urgent safeguarding action does not wait for that process to finish.

If the request does not fit Sarah's Law

Police should explain why an application is not being progressed and what may happen instead. Even when the disclosure scheme does not apply, concerns about a child's safety can still be reported and acted upon.

Can I apply anonymously?

Police can still receive and act on safeguarding information from somebody who does not identify themselves, but Police.uk states that information cannot be disclosed to an applicant under Sarah's Law if their identity cannot be confirmed.

What can police disclose?

Police may disclose relevant information if the legal test for sharing it is met. This can include information about child sexual offences or other known risks that are relevant to protecting the particular child or children.

Not a full criminal record

Sarah's Law does **not** provide general access to someone's complete criminal record. Police only disclose information considered necessary for safeguarding. It is also not a substitute for a DBS check for employment or regulated roles.

Confidentiality

If police plan to disclose information to you, Police.uk states that you will be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement. The information is provided so it can be used to protect the child, not for wider publication or circulation.

If other people need to know

Do not simply pass a disclosure on. If you believe another person needs the information to protect a child, tell the police and let them decide how the information should be shared.

What if there is no information to share?

Police may tell you there is no information to share. This should not be treated as a guarantee that a person is safe. Harmful behaviour may not previously have been reported, detected or recorded, and safeguarding concerns should still be taken seriously.

Trust the concern enough to ask for help

You do not need a Sarah's Law disclosure before reporting worrying behaviour. If something a child says, does or experiences concerns you, or an adult's behaviour towards children feels unsafe, use the appropriate safeguarding or police route.

What Sarah's Law cannot be used for

Checking your neighbourhood

There is no UK process under Sarah's Law for obtaining a list of sex offenders living in your area. The scheme concerns a specific person who has contact with a specific child or children.

Checking an employee

Sarah's Law is not a substitute for the **Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS)**. Employers and organisations should use the appropriate DBS processes where a role is eligible.

General curiosity about a named person

You cannot use the scheme simply to obtain information about somebody you have heard is a sex offender. There must be a relevant safeguarding connection with a specific child or children.

Sarah's Law and Clare's Law

The schemes have different purposes. Sarah's Law concerns risks to **children** from a person who has contact with them. Clare's Law — the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme — concerns information that may help protect a person from domestic abuse by a current or former partner.

Related resource

If your concern is about the risk a partner or ex-partner may pose to an adult, see the dedicated **Clare's Law** resource in this collection.

If you are supporting a child

Try to create opportunities for the child to communicate without leading or repeatedly questioning them. If they tell you something concerning, listen, take them seriously and seek safeguarding advice. Do not confront the person you are worried about if doing so could increase risk or interfere with a safeguarding response.

Support & practical reminders

Immediate danger

Call **999** if a child or anybody else is in immediate danger.

Police

Applications can be made through **Police.uk**, by calling **101**, or by visiting a local police station. Concerns about possible child abuse can also be reported directly to police.

NSPCC

The NSPCC provides advice for adults who are worried about a child and information about recognising and responding to abuse. Use its current contact information when seeking support.

Things to remember

- Anyone with a genuine concern can make an application.
- The request must concern a specific person and a specific child or children.
- The applicant may not be the person who receives a disclosure.
- Police may act on safeguarding concerns even when nothing can be disclosed to you.
- No disclosure is not proof that there is no risk.
- Sarah's Law is not a DBS check and not a neighbourhood sex-offender register.

About this resource

This PDF provides general educational information about the Child Sex Offender Disclosure Scheme. It is not individual legal or safeguarding advice. If you are concerned that a child may be at risk, use current safeguarding and police guidance for your circumstances.

Information reviewed: September 2026

References & further information

Home Office (GOV.UK). *Child sex offender disclosure scheme guidance*. Current central guidance and public information for the scheme commonly known as Sarah's Law.

Home Office (2023). *Annex E: Child sex offender disclosure scheme — public guidance*. Guidance on eligibility, applications, disclosures and safeguarding.

Police.uk. *Sarah's Law (Child Sex Offender Disclosure Scheme)*. Current public guidance covering who can apply, online applications and the disclosure process.

Police.uk. *What happens after you apply*. Current information on initial checks, interviews, identity verification, assessment, confidentiality and indicative timescales.

Scope of this guide

This resource focuses on the Child Sex Offender Disclosure Scheme as described by **Home Office and Police.uk guidance for England and Wales**. Other parts of the UK have their own disclosure arrangements, so use the relevant local police guidance outside England and Wales.