 St John Ambulance St John Ambulance Ireland (SJAI)	Standard Operating Procedure SOP No.: 004-006 Version: 1
Safeguarding and Vetting Policy and Procedures	

- **Purpose**

St John Ambulance Ireland is committed to safeguarding all children, young people, and adults that it comes into contact with.

Whilst the organisation has a statutory obligation it also has a moral duty to ensure it functions in a way that safeguards and promotes the welfare of its staff, customers, service users and learners.

Our National vetting processes are in place for all and must be completed in advance of membership as aligned to our recruitment process and organisational reference checks.

This policy sets out recruitment and vetting requirements for being an adult volunteer. The recruitment and vetting procedures also set out the recruitment process for volunteers.

The policy applies to adults who want to join St John Ambulance either as a member or recognised volunteer existing adult members or recognised volunteers and anyone who is responsible for delivering the recruitment and induction process.


St John is committed to our continuous review and monitoring of all safeguarding processes.

1. Safeguarding Policy Statement
2. Safeguarding Policy Booklet
3. National Vetting Procedures
4. Safeguarding Training
5. Continuous Monitoring of both processes and volunteer engagement.

The purpose of this policy and its subsequent procedures are to outline a clear framework to safeguarding children, young people and adults so that all staff and those working on behalf of the St John Ambulance Ireland are aware of their roles and responsibilities in identifying concerns, sharing information, and taking prompt action.

These procedures include an overarching Vetting system that ensures all members are vetted and reviewed both pre membership of the organisation and at set durations as laid down by both legislative and organisational requirements.

St John Ambulance Ireland believes that all individuals have an equal right to protection from abuse, regardless of their age, gender, race, religion, ability, language, background, membership of the travelling community, or sexual identity and consider the welfare of the individual as paramount.

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The organisation will take every reasonable step to ensure that children, young people and adults are protected. We will safeguard individuals by:

- Valuing them, listening to and respecting them
- Providing a safe environment for children, young people and adults to learn in.
- Identifying individuals who are suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm, and report concerns swiftly to relevant agencies
- Working in partnership with other relevant agencies to support multi-agency safeguarding work
- Responding effectively to any circumstances giving grounds for concern, or where formal complaints or expressions of anxiety are relayed.
- Providing safeguarding training to all staff to ensure they are aware of their responsibilities and are knowledgeable of the types and signs of abuse
- Recruiting all staff safely by ensuring that all the necessary checks are made
- Regularly monitoring and evaluating how our policies, procedures and practices are working to safeguard children and adults.

- **Scope and Responsibilities**

This policy applies to all staff, paid staff, volunteers' workers, learners, clients, tutors, contractors, or any other persons who may work on, visit or receive training on St John Ambulance Ireland premises or operational events.

We expect everyone to have read, understood and adhere to this policy and its related procedures.


Responsibilities	Personnel Responsible
Implementation of this SOP	Safeguarding/ Vetting Team
Approval of this SOP	Commissioner
Maintenance of this SOP	Head of Central Organisation

- **Procedure**

Governing Legislation and Frameworks

The principle pieces of legislation and inter-agency frameworks governing this policy and procedures are:

- Child Care Act 1991
- Children Act 2001
- Health Act 2004
- Protection for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act 1998
- Children First: National Guidance 2011
- Child Protection and Welfare Practice Handbook 2011
- Safeguarding Vulnerable Persons at Risk of Abuse 2014

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- National Consent Policy HSE 2014
- The Equal Status Act 2004
- Data Protection (Amendment) Act 2003

Principles to Protecting Children and Young People

Children First National Guidance (2011) highlights 10 key principles to inform best practice in child protection and welfare. The key principles which explicitly link with this policy are:

- Welfare of the child is of paramount importance.
- Children have a right to be heard, listened to and taken seriously.
- Parents and carers have a right to respect and should be consulted and involved in matters that concern their family.
- The criminal dimension of any action should not be ignored.
- The prevention, detection and treatment of child abuse or neglect requires a coordinated multi-disciplinary approach, effective management, clarity of responsibility and training of personnel in organisations working with children.
- Professionals and agencies working with adults, who for a range of reasons have serious difficulties meeting their children basic needs for safety and security, must consider the impact of the behaviour on their child and act in the child's best interests.


Principles to Safeguarding Adults

Vulnerable adults have a right to be treated with respect and to feel safe. Health Service Executive outline the following principles as critical to safeguarding of vulnerable persons from abuse:

- Human Rights
- Person centeredness
- Advocacy
- Confidentiality
- Empowerment
- Collaboration

Training

- All St John Ambulance Ireland employees/volunteers are required to undertake child and adult safeguarding training relevant to their role.
- Specialist safeguarding roles will attend appropriate training to support them in fulfilling their duties. Where required this training will be sourced externally.
- Safeguarding training will be repeated as required and whenever changing legislation and responsibilities requires it. All operational staff and safeguarding leads must attend / complete at least one safeguarding training event every two years.

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- The relevant recruitment & vetting requirements for the member must be completed satisfactorily
- The Commissioner or delegated volunteer lead must confirm that the new volunteer is suitable.
- The relevant recruitment and vetting requirements for the role/s must be completed satisfactorily.

1.1 Vetting Process

The Safeguarding/ Vetting Team will be designated as the contact who will be responsible for the implementation of this policy.

All vetting applications for SJAI shall be processed by an Authorised Signatory/Liaison Person who is trained by the Garda Vetting Unit in the management of Vetting applications and disclosures.

The Vetting Act, section 12 requires St John Ambulance Ireland to obtain a vetting disclosure from the Vetting Bureau prior to employment of, contracting of, permitting or placement of a person to undertake relevant work or activities with children or vulnerable persons.

Disclosures

The attached schedule sets out those offences or categories of offences which will disqualify candidates.

It should be noted that a disclosure from the Vetting Bureau may also include “specified information”.


“Specified information” or “soft information” in relation to a person who is the subject of an application for a vetting disclosure means information other than criminal convictions held by An Garda Síochána that leads to a bona-fide belief that a person poses a threat to children or vulnerable persons.

The Act states that:

‘Where a member of staff of the Bureau considers there is specified information relating to a person who is the subject of an application for vetting disclosure, he or she shall refer the matter to the Chief Bureau Officer for assessment and determination under section 15 as to whether the information concerned should be disclosed.

The Chief Bureau Officer shall assess the application for vetting disclosure and the specified information relating to the person who is the subject of that application but he or she shall not decide that that information concerned should be disclosed unless

- he or she reasonably believes that that information is of such a nature as to give rise to a bona fide concern that the person concerned may
- harm any child or vulnerable person

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- cause any child or vulnerable person to be harmed
- put any child or vulnerable person at risk of harm
- attempt to harm any child or vulnerable person, or incite another person to harm any child or vulnerable person
- he or she is satisfied that its disclosure is necessary, proportionate, and reasonable in the circumstances for the protection of children or vulnerable persons or both, as the case may be.

Because of the nature of “specified information” and the requirements in the Act, including an appeal process available to the vetting applicant before “specified information” can be disclosed, Vetting team and Commissioner will determine whether a vetting applicant whose disclosure from the Bureau includes “specified information” is a suitable person to volunteer within the organisation.


In such a case the vetting applicant will be afforded an opportunity to make representations to the Board of Directors before the board comes to a decision on the matter.

The following schedule also sets out other offences or categories of offences which may disqualify. In deciding whether a particular conviction renders a candidate unsuitable for appointment, St John Ambulance will have regard to:

- the nature of the offence and its possible relevance to the post.
- the age of the offence (offences many years in the past may be less relevant than more recent offences).
- the frequency of the offence (a series of offences will give more cause for concern than an isolated minor conviction).
- Offences which are not sexual or violent in nature or drug related offences of a minor nature committed before the age of 18 will be judged in the light of the age of the applicant at the time of the offence.
- Where the vetting process discloses pending prosecutions or unsuccessful prosecutions, such prosecutions will be assessed in the light of the nature, age and frequency of the alleged offence(s) and of the age of the candidate at the time of the alleged offences.

Where the vetting process discloses pending prosecutions or unsuccessful prosecutions or ‘specified information’ as defined in the Vetting Act, such disclosures will be assessed in the light of the nature, age and frequency of the alleged offence(s) and of the age of the candidate.

Statutory vetting will, in addition to a check for criminal records, include a check for any relevant “soft information”.

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"Soft information" referred to as "specified information" in the Vetting Act, is information other than criminal convictions held by An Garda Síochána that leads to a bona-fide belief that a person poses a threat to children or vulnerable persons.

- The vetting officer will meet the applicant in person and in privacy.
- The applicant will be informed of the nature of the disclosure and will be given an opportunity to respond to it.
- The officer is authorised by the board to determine if the outcome of the vetting of a candidate has been satisfactory or not, the determination being made in accordance with this policy.
- Should the officer deem it necessary, he/she may consult the commissioner before reaching a decision.
- The only circumstance in which a disclosure of convictions or prosecutions would be made known to the other senior officers would be where the applicant consents that they be consulted.
- A copy of the vetting disclosure document will be given to the applicant.

References


If you are recruiting or registering adult volunteers, you must make sure two satisfactory references are provided for the following;

- all individuals, in any role, over 18 who are new to volunteering
- all individuals, in any role who are returning to St John Ambulance after a break of more than 12 months and are over 18-
- A referee will be asked to complete a character reference in the form of a set questionnaire. This is to help St John Ireland establish whether the enquirer is suitable to the role of volunteering.

All staff / volunteer roles in are classed as regulated activity. This means they require the completion of an enhanced criminal record disclosure check.

We will need two satisfactory references in all cases.

- St John Ambulance Ireland will have in place safer recruitment practices to ensure those recruited are the best candidates for the role and are suitable to work with children and adults with care and support needs.
- St John Ambulance Ireland will also adhere to safer recruitment procedures to engage with staff, volunteers, and any contractors. This includes undertaking the appropriate level of vetting and referencing.

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- **Children and Young Persons (10 to 18-year olds) on St John Ambulance Ireland premises**

- Thorough risk assessments must be undertaken to ensure that when young people (10- 18-year olds) are attending St John Ambulance Ireland premises they are safe, supported and their presence is managed to minimise the risk of vulnerability.
- Due to health and safety and wider safeguarding requirements, children under the age of 18 years who are not participating within a programme should not be brought onto St John Ambulance Ireland premises. This also includes the children of St John Ambulance Ireland staff.

- **Barriers to Recognising Abuse in Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities**

Children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities are more vulnerable to abuse than non-disabled children. Some of our learners, service users and customers may have life-long developmental difficulties, complex learning needs and autism.

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Due to the complexity of needs staff must be alert of the additional barriers that exist in relation to disabled children when recognising the signs, symptoms and indicators of all aspects of abuse.

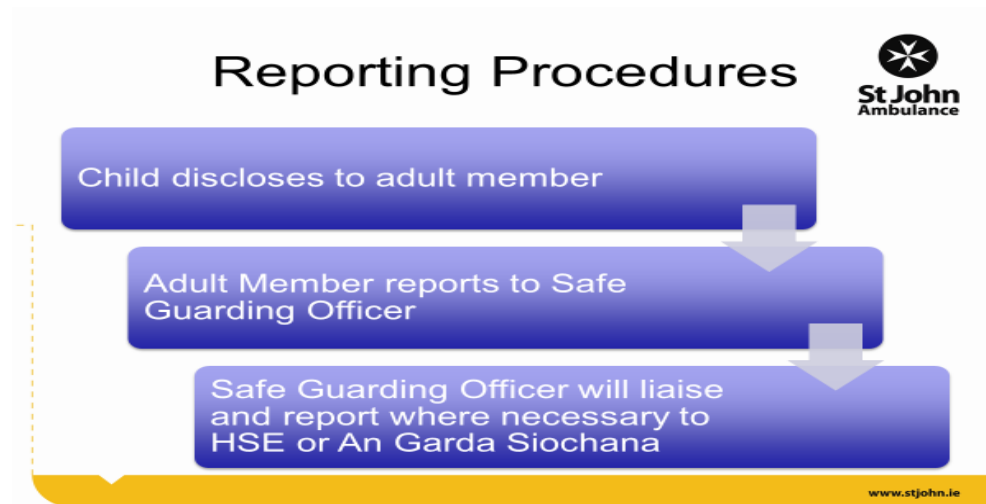
Additional barriers that may exist which staff might not be consciously aware of include:

- Over identifying with the child's / young person's parents / carers and being reluctant to accept that abuse or neglect has taken place
- Assumptions that indicators of possible abuse such as behaviour, mood and injury that relates to a child's disability without further explorations
- Not being able to understand the child / young person's method of communication
- A lack of knowledge about the child's / young person, e.g. not knowing their usual behaviour.

- **Recording and Information Sharing**


- All safeguarding concerns, decisions and actions will be recorded promptly and saved securely. This includes retaining a copy of a referral and evidence of prompt completion of any agreed actions to protect a child or adult.
- Information sharing decisions will be recorded whether or not the decision is taken to share. Reasons to share should also include what information has been shared and to whom.
- Consideration must be given about what information to share and the impact of disclosing information on the individual or any third party. Any information shared must be proportionate to the need and level of risk. It must also be accurate, relevant, and adequate to the purpose of sharing the information.
- From the outset of identifying safeguarding concerns we will be open and transparent with the individual about why, what, how and with whom information will, or could be shared. We will also seek their agreement to share information, unless it is unsafe or inappropriate to do so.
- All information should be shared in a timely manner to reduce the risk of harm, and in an appropriate and secure way.

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Accountability / Implementation

- St John Ambulance Ireland's Commissioner holds the overarching accountability for the organisations safeguarding arrangements.
- Our National Safeguarding officer will hold the Safeguarding Board lead with strategic responsibility for safeguarding across the organisation.
- They will also ensure any organisational processes to meeting legislative requirements, this policy and compliance processes are reported to senior membership.
- St John Ambulance Ireland must ensure service specific procedures are implemented and reviewed to ensure compliance with this policy and our statutory obligations. We must also ensure safeguarding roles within their functions of responsibility are supported by the provision of sufficient time, funding, and support to fulfil our children's and adults safeguarding responsibilities effectively.
- National Safeguarding Officer will define policy and operational safeguarding processes, in doing so they must ensure policies are contemporary with legislative requirements and that processes across the Group are supporting swift and effective practices.
- All staff and volunteer members are responsible for following through the related safeguarding procedures and ensuring they have the sufficient training and divisional management support.

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- Whilst all members of the public/learners must be informed of St John Ambulance Ireland safeguarding policy and complaints procedures, staff and volunteers must ensure that all young persons and adults with special educational needs and disabilities next of kin or advocate are also all informed of these policies.

References

- Safeguarding vulnerable persons at risk of abuse National Policy & Procedures (HSE)
- <https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/socialcare/safeguardingvulnerableadults/>
- www.safeguardingireland.org
- Hiqa.ie