



# A Guide to Staying Safe as a Volunteer

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# Introduction

Everyone has the right to volunteer and it can be a hugely valuable and rewarding experience. As a volunteer, it is important to know that your safety is a high priority. This guide sets out the dos and don'ts of volunteer safeguarding, to ensure that volunteers remain as safe as possible.

## Staying safe during COVID-19

During the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, new volunteer health and safety procedures were introduced by the Government to stop the spread of the virus, including guidance on hand washing, wearing a mask and keeping two metres away from people while volunteering. For more details, see the Government's guidance on enabling safe and effective volunteering during coronavirus [here](#).

While this guidance may change in the future, it is important to be aware of and follow all health and safety advice given by your voluntary organisation when carrying out your volunteer activity. At Community Southwark we have a safeguarding lead and you can access all of our safeguarding resources [here](#).

*Follow all health and safety advice given by your voluntary organisation*

## Personal safety for lone volunteers

A lone volunteer is anyone who is required to volunteer alone or unsupervised, which can sometimes come with additional risks. For example, volunteers collecting donations on the street could be seen as easy targets by potential thieves, particularly if they are by themselves and distracted by other people.

There are several important safety considerations for lone volunteers, many of which also apply to volunteers who are being supervised. Always ensure that:

- you have full knowledge of any risk to which you may be exposed
- you understand the procedure to follow if something goes wrong while volunteering
- someone within the voluntary organisation, such as a supervisor, knows your schedule including details of where you're going, at what times and who you'll be meeting
- you have an appropriate means of communication, such as a mobile phone that is fully charged, while volunteering

## Handling money

If your volunteer role involves handling money, the voluntary organisation should set out clear processes for you to follow to ensure safe handling. For example, if your role is to purchase

grocery items for a vulnerable person, follow simple precautions such as keeping a record of any money spent and provide shopping receipts.

Community Impact Bucks have created a useful resource outlining the dos and don'ts of handling money during COVID-19 which you can read [here](#).

## Sharing personal information

To keep yourself and others safe, be cautious about how and with whom you share personal information such as your email address, phone number, social media profiles, or home address. It is important to be aware of your organisation's data protection policy, which sets out guidance that will help you handle people's information responsibly. When in doubt, always double check with your volunteer supervisor before sharing or collecting personal information.

## Data protection & sharing data: what you need to know

### Creating a data protection policy

As an organisation, it is essential to have a data protection policy in place. NCVO have created a useful guide on writing a data protection policy and procedures which you can read [here](#).

### Common data protection questions & answers

#### Do I need to comply with data protection rules during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic?

- Yes. To protect the privacy of your staff, volunteers and organisations you work with, you must continue to comply with all data protection rules including the GDPR and the UK Data Protection Act 2018.

#### Can I share information with other organisations?

- Generally, you can share personal data with other organisations provided that you inform individuals that you will share personal data with organisations other than yours – you should do so before sharing any information. You could inform them via your online privacy notice, and you should ideally name the organisations or categories of organisations, (e.g. NHS departments, local councils, non-profit organisations), you will share the information with.

#### If I can share information, do I need to collect an individual's consent?

- Consent is one possible option but you don't necessarily need consent to collect personal data and share it with other organisations. For example, vulnerable people may not always be able to give consent, or it may be challenging for you to collect consent from whoever holds parental responsibility for a child. In such circumstances, and where it is essential to protect the life of an individual or their physical integrity, you may share their data with other

organisations because it is in the individual's vital interest to do so. For more information, see the [ICO's guidance on consent](#) and their [note for community groups](#).

## Do I need to inform people about the personal data I hold about them?

- Yes. Information and transparency are key so you should always inform individuals that you are processing personal data about them, tell them how you use it, for what purposes and tell them the rights they have over their personal data.
- Use your own privacy policy as a guide. If you don't have one, the ICO has published a [template privacy notice](#) that you can use as a starting point. When the emergency is over, make sure you and your volunteers securely delete or destroy any personal data that you no longer need.

## Who can help with data protection?

- The ICO recognises the unprecedented challenges we are all facing during the COVID-19 pandemic. If you need more help, [contact the ICO](#) or seek professional advice if you have a specific query.

## ICO resources

- [Data Protection FAQ about COVID-19](#)
- [COVID-19 and community groups](#)

## Volunteer rights

Unlike employees, volunteers aren't protected by an employment contract. However, the voluntary organisation should have policies and agreements in place to protect their volunteer's rights. All volunteers have the right to be treated fairly and with respect.

## References

While referencing is not a legal requirement, it is recommended to screen potential volunteers, especially if the nature of the volunteer role involves working with vulnerable individuals. Usually two references will be requested prior to starting the volunteer activity. Suitable referees can be a former employer, other professionals such as a social worker or teacher, or a personal friend – anyone who can attest to your character, work ethic, and skills.

## Volunteer agreement

When you begin a new volunteer role, you should be given a volunteer agreement that sets out what you can expect from the voluntary organisation during your time spent volunteering. This usually includes:

- the level of supervision and support to be received

- any training to be received
- health and safety issues
- whether you are covered under the organisation's employer or public liability insurance
- any expenses that will be covered

## Health & safety

Health and safety should be a priority for all voluntary organisations, to enable you to carry out your volunteer activities effectively in a safe environment. Legally, the Health & Safety at Work etc Act 1974 places a duty on organisations to ensure the health, safety and welfare of both employees and volunteers. For more information on preparing a health and safety policy, you can read the HSE guidance [here](#).

## Risk assessment

Before you begin a volunteer activity, the voluntary organisation should always conduct a risk assessment to identify potential risks or hazards. As a volunteer, it is in the interest of your own safety to complete this risk assessment. The voluntary organisation should then have processes in place to manage and control any risks or hazards identified during the assessment. For organisations, a useful risk assessment template is available on the HSE website [here](#).

## DBS

A DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) check is a process for gathering information about a volunteer's criminal history. It helps organisations make safer recruitment decisions and prevents unsuitable people from working with vulnerable groups. In order to keep both beneficiaries and volunteers safe, it may be necessary to conduct a DBS check on potential volunteers.

When deciding whether or not to undertake DBS checks for your volunteers, consider:

- the level of contact the volunteer will have with vulnerable children and/or adults
- the level of supervision the volunteer will have

For more information on DBS checks, refer to the government website [here](#).

## Always speak up

If at any point during your volunteering activity you have concerns for your own safety, or the safety of others, you should speak to your volunteer supervisor immediately.

- Volunteering can be demanding, so if you ever begin to feel stressed or unhappy, tell your supervisor. Sometimes, you may need to take a break and remember that it is always your choice to volunteer.
- If you are concerned for the welfare of another person, whether it be another volunteer or a person you are helping, be vigilant and report your concerns to your supervisor.

- If someone confides in you that they are at risk of harm, abuse, or neglect, you should listen to them, take what they say seriously, and reassure them that you will take action to keep them safe. Don't ever promise to keep it a secret, as this can be more damaging.

## Resources

- Community Southwark one-on-one volunteer advice appointment: [book here](#)
- Community Southwark: [Safeguarding Resources](#)
- Community Impact Bucks: [Handling Money Guidance](#)
- HSE: [Health and Safety Policy Template](#)
- HSE: [Risk Assessment Template](#)
- ICO: [Data Protection FAQ about COVID-19](#)
- ICO: [COVID-19 and community groups](#)
- ICO: [Guidance on consent](#)
- NCVO: [Writing a data protection policy and procedures](#)
- NCVO: [Volunteer Rights](#)
- NCVO: [Safeguarding for informal volunteer led groups](#)
- People Safe: [How to protect the safety of volunteers](#)
- UK Government: [Volunteer placements, rights and expenses](#)
- UK Government: [Disclosure and barring service](#)
- UK Government: [Enabling safe and effective volunteering during coronavirus](#)