



**Tusla  
Fostering**



# Protecting Children's Personal Data

## Guidance Document for Foster Carers

tusla.ie

**TUSLA**  
An Ghníomhaireacht um  
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach  
Child and Family Agency



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# What is Personal Data?

**Personal data** is any information that relates to a person or that can identify a person.

What identifies a person can be as simple as their name or phone number, or other types of information such as an address, photograph or identification number, for example, a person's PPS number.

Personal data relating to a person's health information sexual orientation, religion, political affiliation, etc. is considered to be **sensitive personal data**. Extra precaution must be taken to protect this information as if it were shared or disclosed, the potential impact on the person it relates to would be more severe.



# Data Protection in Tusla

As a statutory body, Tusla is permitted to collect, use, share, amend, transfer, store, and dispose of, personal data. This is called **processing**.

When we refer to **data protection** in Tusla, we are referring to Tusla's obligation to take care of everyone's personal data and process it correctly. We will only process personal data when it's required for Tusla to perform its role and/or permitted by law.

If you would like to know more about how and why your personal data is processed by Tusla, or about your data protection rights, please read our **Data Protection Notice** available on [www.tusla.ie](http://www.tusla.ie), or speak with your foster link social worker.



# Protecting Personal Data as a Foster Carer

As a foster carer, you are responsible for keeping your foster child(ren) safe. This includes keeping their personal data safe.

You will naturally be responsible for collecting, sharing, storing, and disposing of, personal data on behalf of your foster child(ren).

There may be occasions where you don't realise you are collecting personal data. For example, school cards or photos of the child. Therefore, we ask you to consider the information you have in your possession and the impact it could have on a child or family if that information was shared with an unauthorised person.

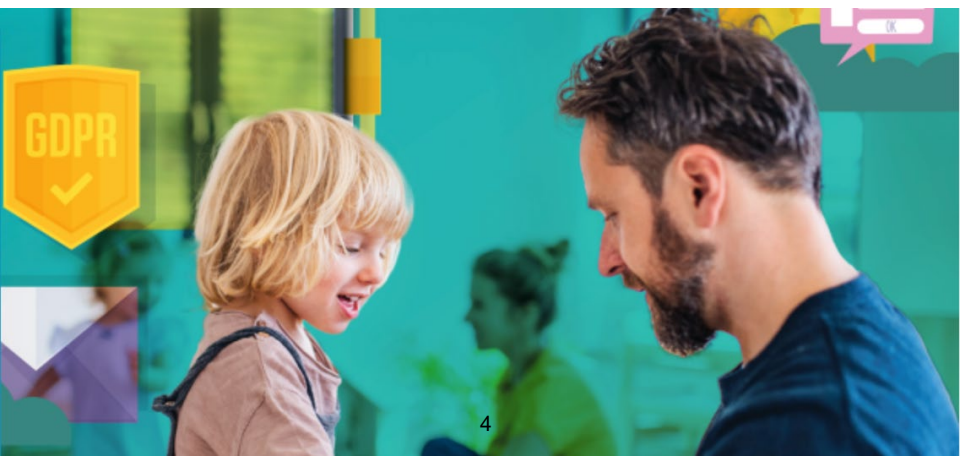


# Protecting Personal Data as a Foster Carer

If you are ever unsure about the kind of information you can share, and with whom, please consult with your foster link social worker. Your foster link social worker can raise any queries on your behalf with the Data Protection Unit in Tusla.

Remember that you *are* allowed to share personal data with Tusla - you just need to protect it when you do.

Please read on for information on the practical steps you can take to protect your foster child(ren)'s personal data.



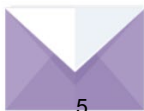
# Lost, Misplaced or Incorrectly Shared Information

Sometimes, despite taking care, personal data is lost, misplaced or shared with the incorrect person. When this happens, it can result in a personal data breach.

Although we try our best to avoid this happening, personal data breaches can and do happen. If this happens, your foster link social worker will be there to help and support you.

**Please tell your foster link social worker immediately if you have lost, misplaced, or incorrectly shared sensitive data about a child(ren) in care.**

Your foster link social worker will contact the Data Protection Unit (DPU) on your behalf and the DPU will take the necessary steps to minimise the impact and resolve the breach in accordance with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) requirements.





# How to Protect Personal Data

## Protecting Paper Documents

If you have paper documents that contain sensitive personal data in your possession. Please ensure to:

- Never leave documents unattended unless they are stored in a secure and safe location, for example in a locked drawer or cabinet.
- Take extra care to keep documents safe and secure when removing or transferring them from a secure space.
- Following the ceasement of a placement, please speak to your social worker to agree the process for returning or disposing of documents.
- If you are disposing of Tusa documents or other documents relating to the child in care, always ensure that the documents are destroyed and illegible before you dispose of them. Do not place intact documents with personal data into an ordinary bin.



# How to Protect Personal Data

## Sending Post

If you are posting documents relating to the child(ren) in care, please remember to:

- Never send any documents containing sensitive personal data by regular post. They must go by registered post, courier, or be shared in-person.
- If possible, send the document by secure electronic means instead (see pages 8 and 9).
- Always double check that the name of the recipient and address are correct.
- Make sure that the envelope you use is:
  - Suitably sized, robust, and well sealed.
  - Clearly and accurately addressed.
  - Marked 'Private and Confidential. To be opened by the addressee only'.
  - Revealing no other information such as details of the documents inside.



# How to Protect Personal Data

## Sending Email

If you are in contact with your foster link social worker by email regarding a child(ren) in care, please remember to:

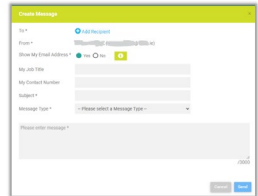
- Use initials where practical when referring to the child(ren) or family members.
- Never include sensitive information in the subject line or body of the email.
- Put sensitive information into a password protected attachment. Share the password separately (by phone or a follow up email).
- Double check that you have included the correct email address for the intended recipient. Be careful when using the auto-fill function as it is easy to select the wrong email.
- Take care using the 'forward' or 'reply all' functions. Check that you are not sharing too much information by including a previous email thread, or sharing information with an unintended recipient.
- You can also use the Tusla My Messages portal to share information with Tusla (see page 9).



# How to Protect Personal Data

## Tusla My Messages Portal

**My Messages** is a secure messaging tool developed by Tusla to enable two-way communication between registered users of the Portal.



### How to use My Messages

- Sign up for an account at <https://portal.tusla.ie>
- Log into the Portal and click on 'new message' to create a message.
- Upon entering a valid email address, the File Attachment capability will be available.
- When you send a message to a registered user, an email notification will be issued to that user.
- All messages received can be viewed and replied to in your inbox. All sent messages can be viewed within the sent folder.
- Click 'full thread' to show/ hide the entire message thread.
- Any attachments that have been sent with a message will appear beside that message in the thread.

# How to Protect Personal Data

## Tusla My Messages Portal

It is important to note that messages (including any attached files) over 30 days inactive will be deleted and no longer accessible on the public Portal.

Do not encrypt or password protect any attachments – the My Messages application will handle that itself. Any encrypted, or password protected, documents will be rejected as they cannot be virus scanned by the application.

**Register today at <https://portal.tusla.ie>. The Tusla staff member you wish to message must also be registered.**

# How to Protect Personal Data

## On the Phone

If you are sharing information regarding your foster child(ren) with your social worker on the phone, please remember to:

- Never discuss details of your foster child(ren) in a public space. It's crucial that you never disclose sensitive information to anyone other than those who are authorised to hear it.
- Be mindful of who is within listening distance. Even at home, there may be people nearby that should not overhear your conversation.
- Never share confidential information about foster child(ren) over text message or other messaging apps.
- We recommend never saving information regarding foster child(ren) to your phone. If you do have information which is accessible via your phone (such as an email app), make sure that it is password protected and two-step verification is turned on, where possible.



## Further Information and Resources

The Data Protection Commission (DPC) has now published guidance on data protection rights of children. There are a number of resources available on the DPC website. ([www.dataprotection.ie](http://www.dataprotection.ie)).

Should you ever have any queries or concerns in respect of the personal data of your foster child, your own data protection rights in respect of Tusla, or if you are concerned that a personal data breach may have occurred, please raise these with your foster link social worker who can contact the Data Protection Unit in Tusla.



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