

DBS CHECKS AND SAFER VOLUNTEERING: WHAT CHARITIES NEED TO KNOW

A safer volunteering environment comes from culture, communication, and common sense—not just DBS checks. While a DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) check can help identify risks, it should never be your only safeguarding tool.

Start with a strong recruitment process:

- Write a clear role description
- Hold a structured interview
- Request at least two references
- Provide induction and training
- Offer ongoing supervision so you build a relationship with the volunteer

When Is a DBS Check Needed?

Not all volunteer roles need a DBS check. You should only request one if the role meets legal requirements. Asking for a check when it's not needed could break the law and breach privacy rules. Each role should be assessed individually.

You should consider a DBS check only if the role includes:

- Regular, unsupervised contact with children or vulnerable adults
- Regulated activity, such as personal care, teaching, or medical assistance
- Contact that is frequent, intensive (4+ times in 30 days), or overnight

Types of DBS

1. Basic DBS Check

- Shows: Unspent convictions and cautions
- Used for: General roles like admin, retail, or reception duties

2. Standard DBS Check

- Shows: Spent and unspent convictions, cautions, reprimands, and warnings
- Used for: Positions of trust like finance or security roles

3. Enhanced DBS Check

- Shows: Everything in a Standard check, plus relevant local police information
- Used for: Roles with regular contact with children or vulnerable adults

4. Enhanced DBS Check with Barred List(s)

- Shows: All of the above, plus whether someone is barred from working with children or vulnerable adults
- Used for: Roles involving regulated activity (e.g. teaching, personal care)
- This is the highest level of check and required by law for many safeguarding roles

The DBS Update Service (Portable DBS System)

The DBS Update Service lets volunteers reuse their DBS certificate for different roles or charities without reapplying every time—if the check type and level are the same.

How It Works

- Volunteers register within 30 days of getting their DBS certificate
- Charities can check their status online with consent
- The certificate must be the correct level for the new role

Why It Helps

For Charities:

- Faster volunteer onboarding
- Saves money and paperwork
- Ideal for one-off or urgent roles
- Easier for small charities to manage

For Volunteers:

- More freedom to help in multiple roles
- Less paperwork and delays
- Better control over their own information

Important:

- The service is free for volunteers (£13/year for paid roles)
- Volunteers must keep their subscription active
- Charities need permission and the certificate number to check status
- If the volunteer's DBS status changes, a new check is needed

By using DBS checks responsibly and supporting volunteers with good practice, charities can build a safer, more inclusive, and welcoming environment for everyone.