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VETA

I WANT TO KNOW

**– WHAT SHOULD I
TELL MY CHILD?**

**Information for parents living with
protected personal data**

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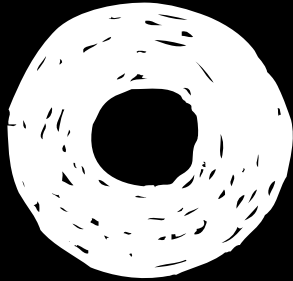
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INTRODUCTION

Children rely on adults for information about their situation in life. For that reason, Brottsoffermyndigheten has produced this guide which is aimed at parents. This guide provides advice for parents on making it easier for your child to live with protected personal data. It has been produced in association with Barnombudsmannen (the Ombudsman for Children in Sweden).

There are just over 4,000 children in Sweden living with protected personal data. Most of these children have protected personal data because one or both of their parents has been subjected to violence or threats. Irrespective of whether the child has suffered personally or not, their life will still be affected by having their personal data protected.



PROTECTED PERSONAL DATA

There are different levels of protection. For some, secrecy marking for a short period is sufficient, while others require fictitious personal data for the rest of their lives.

- Secrecy marking means that a record is made in the Swedish population register indicating that information about that person must not be disclosed without careful examination. The need for secrecy marking tends to be reviewed every year.
- Address protection means that the person being threatened moves to a new address, but continues to be registered at the old one

and their post is forwarded by Skatteverket (the Swedish Tax Agency). Address protection applies for a maximum of three years at a time.

- Fictitious personal data is the highest level of protection and means that you are given a brand new identity, including a new name and new personal identity number.

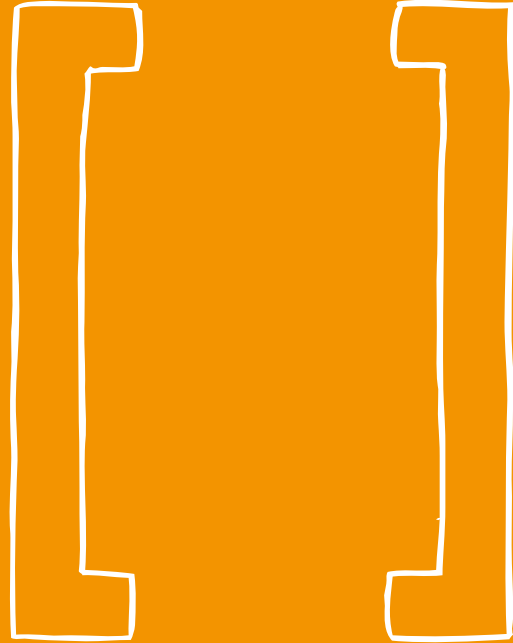
A lot of people apply to Skatteverket themselves to have their personal data protected, while others are given protection following contact with Polisen (the Swedish Police).

More information about how to apply for protected personal data is available at **www.skatteverket.se**.

You can also call Skatteverket on **+46 (0)771-567 567**.

CHILDREN WITH PROTECTED PERSONAL DATA

The personal data of children is often protected because the personal data of one of their parents is protected. The parents may, for example, be subjected to threats because of their work or for having been a witness at a trial. The most common reason is the perpetration of violence in a close relationship, when the threat comes from a person's own family or someone close to them. Children may also be subjected to threats from one or both parents or from a group of relatives.



CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

The UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child is an international agreement that has been adopted by Sweden. The convention describes the rights of children, irrespective of gender, national, ethnic or social origin, religion or disability. Children are entitled to special care and protection because they are often more vulnerable.

THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

is guided by four fundamental principles:

- that all children have the same rights
- that the best interests of the child must be considered in all actions and decisions
- that all children have the right to live and develop
- that all children have the right to express their views and to have those views respected.

Under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, children have the right to be protected from all forms of physical or mental violence, neglect and sexual abuse.

The convention also observes that vulnerable children are entitled to support and assistance.

All children are entitled to a childhood that is free from violence. When a child or other family member is threatened with violence, that person is entitled to feel safe and protected. Protected personal data is intended to keep children and adults safe and to protect them from continued violence. When a family is given protected personal data status, the children are entitled to be involved and be provided with information on what is happening, even when they are young. This makes great demands of the parents. What should you tell children? How much will they understand? What should you do to avoid scaring them?

WHAT DO THE CHILDREN SAY?

Det är jobbigt för barn att leva med hot och många känner s It can be tough for children to live with threats and many of them feel

“DEALING WITH THE FEAR WAS VERY DIFFICULT AT FIRST. I COULDN'T SLEEP AT ALL AT NIGHT. IT WAS REALLY AWFUL.”

Ebba¹

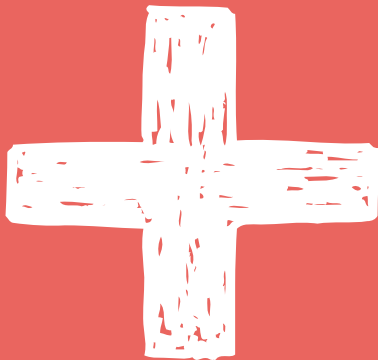
“I FEEL VERY SAFE NOW THAT I HAVE A PROTECTED IDENTITY. I REALLY DO. IT'S SUCH A RELIEF.”

Rebecka¹

unhappy and scared. Protected personal data can provide some security, alleviating any fear. Protected personal data can also cause a lot of bother, particularly as your children get older. A lot of children feel that they don't know what they can and can't tell their friends. It may be difficult to know what to say when friends ask to come home with them after school to play. It is common for children whose personal data is protected to feel alone and to worry about being exposed.

“I DON'T WANT TO SPEND TIME WITH MY FRIENDS BECAUSE I DON'T WANT TO ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS. IT IS HAVING A BIG IMPACT ON ME.”

Sofia¹



Children and young people often find that adults at school, in the health care sector and from various authorities do not know what it is like to live with protected personal data.

“THEN THERE'S ALL THE STUFF TO DO WITH SCHOOL. IT FEELS AS THOUGH YOU HAVE NO CONTROL OVER ANYTHING.”

William¹

¹ All quotes are taken from Barnombudsmannen's Swedish report *Oskyddad* (Unprotected).

WHAT SHOULD YOU TELL CHILDREN?

It can be difficult to know how much to tell your child and there is no general advice that works for everyone. What you decide to tell children is individual and must reflect your situation and theirs, but here are some things to consider:

Be straight with your child. Take the time to explain what is happening. Children notice when their parents are worried or frightened, and they often overhear adults talking to one another. If no one discusses the issue with the child, there is a great risk that they will come up with their own explanations for events. They may then feel even more scared, confused and alone. Knowing often increases the sense of security.

Discuss the children's experiences. When children have experienced threats and violence, they often dwell on it. Discussing problems with an adult helps them to feel safe and secure and enables them to share their experiences with someone. It also gives them an opportunity to ask questions. If the child has been subjected to threats or violence or has observed such behaviour, it is a good idea to explain that you are moving to a safe place. Children have the right to know that they are protected from violence.

– We will be moving but we won't tell Henrik where we are living so that he can't find us and hurt us again.

– I have quarrelled with some other adults and don't want them to come to our home, so we won't tell anyone which town we are moving to.

Avoid details that may frighten children.

Avoid discussing any details about the violence and threats that the child might be unaware of. This can frighten them. However, you do need to give children enough information for them to understand why they should not reveal where they are living.

Avoid lies. Sometimes it is necessary to protect children from things that may frighten them or that they are too young to understand. Remember that children grow up. As they get older, they have the right to know more and it can make for a difficult situation if they have heard things that are not true. The risk then is that they will feel let down and deceived. Instead, explain some of the truth and fill in the details and provide more information as the child gets older.

Support your child – your child should not support you. A lot of children are very eager to comfort and support their parents. This is too great a responsibility for children to bear. Make sure that you have someone you can talk to about your worries and fears.

Protect children from “adult talk”. When discussing your experiences of threats or violence with other adults, make sure that children cannot hear you. Children can be frightened by overhearing something that they do not understand or do not have the opportunity to ask about.

SAYING GOODBYE

Young children need to be involved in major events in their lives. If you have to move, it is best to explain this to children in plenty of time beforehand. If you have time, it is a good idea to say goodbye to your home, friends and neighbours, preschool and local playground.

It may be the case that there is not time to do all this when a family is forced to move and is given protected personal data. Sometimes, it is not possible to take the children's belongings, and you may have to break off contact with relatives, friends and the child's friends at preschool. This is not in the child's best interests, but sometimes there is no other option. The safety of you and your child is paramount.

Try to take belongings with you that are important to your child. It can help if you can take items with you when you move that are important to your child, for example, toys, books, clothes and furniture. Photographs are also often treasured possessions. Sometimes you may also be able to return to see friends and family, etc.

If you are unable to keep in contact with friends and family, it is a good idea to take mementos, such as photos, voice recordings, etc. with you to remind you of these relationships. This can help your child to adjust.

Say goodbye if possible. If it is possible to contact your child's preschool safely, you can ask them to record a greeting for your child. A voice recording or video featuring their friends and teacher, drawings and photos can mean a lot to your child.

HAVE A CONTINGENCY PLAN

When a child or other family member is being threatened, there needs to be a contingency plan in place in case something happens. How can you prepare your surroundings? What can your child do?

A lot of preschools and schools produce a specific action plan for children whose personal data is protected. This outlines why the child needs protection, who needs to know that the child's personal data is protected, whether the child requires additional support and other practical aspects for protecting the child. Alert your child's preschool or school about this procedure if they don't already know!

A Swedish guide called Unga med skyddade personuppgifter (Young people with protected personal data) is available at

www.skolverket.se. You can choose whether or not to tell friends and neighbours, for example, about your situation. There is a risk that the people you tell may tell someone else, but having other people know can also offer some protection. You can often tell people just enough to get help if something serious happens, without giving them the whole story or revealing that your personal data is protected. For example, you can tell your neighbours that you would like them to call the police if they hear sounds of a struggle or screaming coming from your home.

If your child reveals the truth. It may happen that your child forgets the rules and reveals where you live. Children can also be pressured into revealing details about their situation. Whatever the reason, it is important not to blame your child for having disclosed this information. Even if this means an increased risk for the family and having to move again, the child should not feel guilty for having caused this. Talk to your child and say that these things happen and that it is not the child's fault that you have to move again. Children often feel guilty without anyone having said that it is their fault. As an adult, you can relieve the child of this burden by talking about things.

AS YOUR CHILD GETS OLDER

Children's level of maturity at different ages is individual, which makes it difficult to offer general advice on how and when to tell children about the need for protection. No matter how mature the child, it is important to increase the amount of information as the child gets older, enabling the child to cope with different situations in life.

0–3 years: Children always have an adult with them. Protect the child and ensure that he/she is safe. Contact the child's preschool and make sure there is an action plan in place.

3–6 years: Children have more contact with other adults and children. Children understand more and need information. Involve the child in

the preschool's action plan. Consider how much you want their friends' parents to know.

6 years and upward: Children of school age take on more and more individual responsibility. The school places new demands on them, which sometimes causes problems. Make sure that there is an action plan in place and that it is updated each term with the child's involvement. Children often have activities outside of school and go to friends' houses, possibly also sleeping over. What applies for your child? Who should know? What can your child tell other people?

Approaching teenage years

As children approach their teenage years, they increasingly need more information and to be involved, especially when it comes to decisions. Teenagers must make a lot of their own decisions concerning friends, boy-

friends and girlfriends, their free time and their studies. Teenagers whose personal data is protected face making a great many complicated choices, and they can rarely ask their peers and adults for advice. Other people simply do not know enough about what it is like to live under a threat. They may not even know that the teenager has been threatened and has protected personal data.

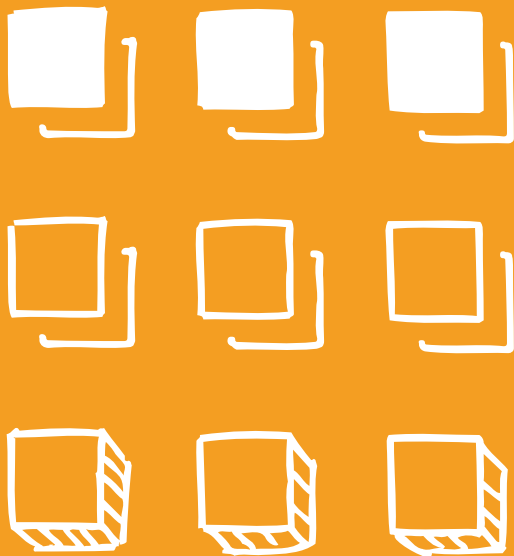
As a parent, you are an incredibly important individual. You are the person who can offer advice and explain why it is important to be so careful in these situations. You are also the person who establishes rules and boundaries. Teenagers must be able to ask questions and discuss rules that are too difficult to follow; otherwise there is a risk that the rules will be broken without you knowing about it. Together, you can determine what the best rules are for your family, bearing in mind your circumstances.

Important issues include, for instance, who they can tell, sports and recreational activities, part-time jobs, social media and the internet.

ABOUT THE INTERNET

The internet is an important part of most young people's lives. They use it to socialise, find information, listen to music, play games, watch films and buy things. However, the internet can be a dangerous place if you are living under a threat, because your identity can be revealed. Children whose personal data is protected cannot use the internet in the same way as other children, and they must be taught about online security before they can use it on their own. This means that you have to start early, perhaps when your child starts school.





ACCEPTING HELP FROM OTHERS

Having protected personal data puts a lot of additional strain on the whole family. If you find it difficult to talk to your children or to answer their questions, help is available from outside the family. The same is true if your child has unhappy memories or exhibits symptoms after having been threatened or having experienced violence. Many children find it helpful to talk to an adult outside of the family who is bound by a duty of confidentiality.

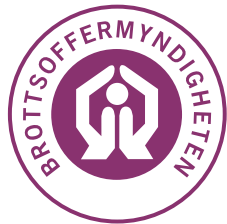
School health services, social services or women's shelters can help you to find counselling services in your area.

MORE INFORMATION FROM BROTTSOFFERMYNDIGHETEN

Information for children living with protected personal data is available at www.jagvillveta.se. This website also provides information for children on subjects including crime, their rights and help and support.

Information is available in a number of languages from **www.brottsoffermyndigheten.se** about the rights of victims of crime and the legal process. Here, you will also find additional contact information for other authorities, agencies and non-profit organisations.

Brottsoffermyndigheten is happy to answer questions concerning compensation relating to a crime. Call the dedicated service line on **+46 (0)90-70 82 00** to speak to an administrator at the criminal injuries unit.



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