



COIMISIÚN UM  
ATHCHÓIRIÚ AN DLÍ  
LAW REFORM  
COMMISSION

PLAIN ENGLISH GLOSSARY  
A REGULATORY  
FRAMEWORK FOR ADULT  
SAFEGUARDING

(LRC PEG 128 - 2024)

# Plain English Glossary

## What are the important words for new adult safeguarding laws?

Below is a table that explains some of the words we use in:

- the plain English summary of our Report on a regulatory framework for adult safeguarding in Ireland, and
- the plain English report on a regulatory framework for adult safeguarding in Ireland.

We explain each word in terms of its meaning for new adult safeguarding laws. Don't worry, you don't have to memorise each word. You can always flick back here to find the meaning of a word when you are reading the other documents.

We know that some people find terms like "mental disorder" or "autism spectrum disorder" offensive. The Commission thought hard about what terms should be used. For example, we need to use precise terms for the criminal law. These terms are used in laws and court cases. The National Disability Authority also said in a recent document that sometimes "medical language" needs to be used in laws.

Words to know	Meaning
<b>Abuse</b>	Actions that harm people. These actions can be physical or mental. Examples of abuse are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• physical violence;</li><li>• lying to make a gain or cause a loss;</li><li>• using words or doing things to hurt someone or make them feel unsafe;</li></ul>

Words to know	Meaning
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• insulting, threatening or intimidating someone; or</li> <li>• pestering, spying or stalking someone.</li> </ul>
<b>Accountability</b>	<p>People taking responsibility for their actions and being open and honest if something goes wrong.</p> <p>Accountability makes sure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• actions taken to keep at-risk adults safe are clear and everyone knows what is required of them;</li> <li>• health and social care services and other agencies are responsible for their actions and can explain how they protect at-risk adults;</li> <li>• service providers are open and honest about how they handle safeguarding issues;</li> <li>• there are proper systems for managing risks, sharing information and reporting.</li> </ul>
<b>Adult at risk of harm, or At-risk adult</b>	<p>An adult at risk of harm or at-risk adult is someone who, because of their physical or mental health, personal traits or life situation, needs help to keep themselves safe from harm at a particular time.</p>
<b>Advocate</b>	<p>A person who supports and argues on behalf of another person.</p>
<b>Anti-social behaviour</b>	<p>Unfriendly or criminal behaviour.</p>

Words to know	Meaning
<b>Approved centre</b>	A place where someone getting mental health treatment stays, that is regulated by the Mental Health Commission.
<b>Assault</b>	This means touching a person without their consent or making threats to touch a person without their consent.
<b>Authorised officers</b>	Staff members of the Safeguarding Body who are allowed to exercise the powers of the Safeguarding Body.
<b>Barred list</b>	A list of people who are not allowed to work in certain professions because of something they did in the past.
<b>Barring Order</b>	<p>An order made by a court that stops abusive behaviour by banning contact between two people.</p> <p>Only people who are married, people who live together in a romantic relationship, and parents of adult children can get barring orders.</p>

Words to know	Meaning
<p><b>Capacity</b></p> <p><b>(The following definition of capacity has the same meaning it does in the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015.)</b></p>	<p>A person’s ability to understand the nature and consequences of making a decision at the time when they make the decision.</p> <p>A person does not have “capacity” to make a decision when they cannot:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• understand information relevant to the decision;</li> <li>• remember the information;</li> <li>• use the information when making the decision; or</li> <li>• communicate their decision.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Child and Family Agency</b></p>	<p>The official name of the government agency commonly called “Tusla”.</p>
<p><b>Code of practice</b></p>	<p>A set of rules made by an organisation that its members, or people who work for it, must follow.</p>
<p><b>Coercion</b></p>	<p>Using violence or intimidation to force someone to do something.</p>
<p><b>Coercive exploitation</b></p>	<p>A new crime that we recommend should be introduced in Ireland. This crime would occur when someone uses controlling or coercive behaviour to</p>

Words to know	Meaning
	<p>access or control the property or financial resources of a relevant person:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• for their own advantage; or</li> <li>• the advantage of someone else.</li> </ul>
<b>Coercive control</b>	<p>Psychological and emotional abuse that makes someone feel trapped or afraid. We recommend that a new crime of coercive control against a relevant person should be introduced in Ireland.</p>
<b>Cross-sectoral</b>	<p>When rules and laws apply to different areas of government services instead of applying just to one area. When we talk about adult-safeguarding laws being cross-sectoral, we mean that they should apply to all government services and not just to the health and social care areas, for example.</p>
<b>Cruelty</b>	<p>This term is used in Irish law to describe different types of abuse of children. For example, assaulting, neglecting or abandoning a child.</p>
<b>Deception</b>	<p>Gaining something or causing someone to lose something by lying.</p>

Words to know	Meaning
<b>Decision support</b>	A service that the Director of the Decision Support Service oversees, that helps people who do not have capacity to make decisions for themselves.
<b>Designated Centre</b>	A place that provides residential settings for older people and for people with disabilities.
<b>Disclosure</b>	This is when someone tells another person all the information that they need to know or ask for.
<b>Duties</b>	Responsibilities that must be followed under the law.
<b>Dwelling</b>	A building or vehicle that is used by someone to live in. It can also be part of a building or vehicle that is being used by someone to live in.
<b>Endangerment</b>	Putting someone in danger.
<b>Financial abuse</b>	<p>Examples of financial abuse are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stealing someone's property,</li> <li>• Lying to someone to make a profit or to cause someone to make a loss, and</li> </ul>

Words to know	Meaning
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taking advantage of someone or treating them unfairly to get a financial benefit.</li> </ul>
<b>Garda Vetting</b>	A type of background check where the Gardaí state if a person has any criminal history. Gardaí vetting is required when someone wants to work with at-risk adults.
<b>Health and social care services</b>	Services provided to people in settings such as hospitals, residential centres, day centres and in their homes.
<b>Ill-treatment</b>	When one person treats another person badly, or in a way that is humiliating.
<b>Independent advocacy</b>	When a person who is not related, or providing a service, to an at-risk adult helps them to understand, and to express their wishes, about something. Independent advocates cannot make decisions for someone else, but they can help at-



Words to know	Meaning
	risk adults to have their voices heard when a decision is being made about them.
<b>Information sharing</b>	This means allowing public agencies to share information with each other. This could be done to prevent harm to the health, safety, and well-being of at-risk adults.
<b>Inherent jurisdiction</b>	A power that only the High Court can use. The High Court will only use this power when there are no laws that govern a situation, but it is necessary to do something to protect a person's rights.
<b>Integration</b>	<p>In the context of public services, this means different agencies and services working together to prevent harm to at-risk adults.</p> <p>This involves making sure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• agencies and services work together to stop harm and to address safeguarding concerns; and</li> <li>• practice, policies and laws are consistent between different services.</li> </ul>
<b>International protection</b>	International protection is a form of asylum. This means that a person who has come to Ireland is allowed to stay here, because their home country is unsafe.

Words to know	Meaning
<b>Interventions</b>	<p>Serious actions that may be taken by the Safeguarding Body or Gardaí to improve a situation and protect an at-risk adult’s rights. These interventions could also interfere with the rights of at-risk adults, their family members and other people. Because of this, permission for an intervention is usually given by a court.</p> <p>These interventions include entering homes and places where at-risk adults live, moving them to a safe place or preventing someone from contacting them.</p>
<b>Intentional(ly)</b>	<p>To do something on purpose.</p>
<b>Harm (in civil law – this is used for many of the other definitions in the non-criminal adult safeguarding law, including in the context of “adult at risk of harm”)</b>	<p>“Harm” in the civil law includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• assaulting an at-risk adult;</li> <li>• neglecting (failing to properly care for) an at-risk adult;</li> <li>• sexual abuse of an at-risk adult; or</li> <li>• damaging an at-risk adult’s property by stealing from them or taking advantage of them.</li> </ul>

Words to know	Meaning
<p><b>Harm (in criminal law – where people are punished for committing crimes)</b></p>	<p>This covers physical or mental pain, any injury to physical or mental health or well-being, and loss to a person when another person unlawfully takes their property, money, pension or social welfare payments.</p>
<p><b>Mandated people</b></p>	<p>People who are required by law to report harm when they know, believe or suspect that an adult at risk of harm has been harmed, is being harmed or is at risk of being harmed.</p>
<p><b>Mate crimes</b></p>	<p>When a person becomes friends with an at-risk adult and gains their trust, in order to take advantage of them. This may involve someone asking an at-risk adult for lots of money on a regular basis and never paying them back. It could also involve someone asking the at-risk adult to do things, for example, sell drugs or store weapons.</p>
<p><b>Neglect</b></p>	<p>This means:</p>

Words to know	Meaning
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• failing to take proper care of someone who is in your care,</li> <li>• not providing them with basic needs like food, clothing or medicine, or</li> <li>• not getting help to provide those needs if you cannot provide them yourself.</li> </ul>
<p><b>No-contact orders</b></p>	<p>Orders that would stop certain people from contacting at-risk adults. We have recommended three types of no-contact orders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Full no-contact order</b> – a no-contact order which is made by a judge and lasts for a maximum of two years.</li> <li>• <b>Interim no-contact order</b> – a no contact order that can be made by a judge without the other person being there, that lasts until the judge makes a decision about whether there should be a full no-contact order.</li> <li>• <b>Emergency no-contact order</b> – a no contact order that can be made by a judge without the other person being there, where there is a very urgent risk to an at-risk adult. It would last for a short length of time.</li> </ul>

Words to know	Meaning
<b>Oversight</b>	When an organisation is in charge of making sure that other organisations, bodies or people are following the rules that apply to them.
<b>Paternalistic</b>	Making decisions for people instead of letting them make decisions for themselves.
<b>Permissive reporting</b>	A model of reporting that allows a person to decide for themselves if they should report an incident or harm.
<b>Personal care</b>	Help from one person to another with their medical, physical or social needs.
<b>Proportionality</b>	<p>A test used by the courts to see if an interference with a right is valid, or if it has gone too far. Proportionality involves making sure that any action or intervention taken:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• is needed for the particular situation;</li> <li>• limits the at-risk adult's freedom as little as possible;</li> <li>• matches the level of risk; and</li> <li>• lasts only as long as needed<sup>1</sup></li> </ul>

Words to know	Meaning
<b>Prevention</b>	Taking steps to make sure that safeguarding measures are in place to prevent abuse or harm to at-risk adults.
<b>Psychological harm</b>	This includes making threats or forcing someone to do something.
<b>Prohibition order</b>	A proposed new order that would stop people who commit certain crimes from doing certain work or activities with at-risk adults again in the future.
<b>Power of entry and inspection</b>	A new power that would allow staff of the Safeguarding Body to go into relevant premises to assess the health, safety, and well-being of at-risk adults.
<b>Power of access to at-risk adults in homes</b>	A proposed power that would allow staff of the Safeguarding Body, and the Gardaí, to access an at-risk adult in their home (or similar place) to assess their health, safety and well-being.
<b>Power of removal and transfer</b>	A proposed power that would allow staff of the Safeguarding Body and the Gardaí to take an at-risk adult from where they are and bring them to somewhere else. This is intended to allow staff of the Safeguarding Body and other health or social

Words to know	Meaning
	care workers to check the health, safety and well-being of the at-risk adult in a safe space.
<b>Publicity order</b>	<p>This is when a person is found guilty of a crime and the court makes an order that information is made available to the public, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the fact the person has been found guilty of a crime;</li> <li>• the facts of the crime; and</li> <li>• the fine or other outcome.</li> </ul>
<b>Reckless(ly)</b>	When you should know that something bad could happen if you are not careful but you do it anyway.
<b>Regulated profession</b>	A job that requires the people who do it to have certain qualifications. This means that there are rules to say who can and cannot work in that job.
<b>Regulations</b>	Laws created by ministers or other public bodies under powers given to them by Acts of the Oireachtas.
<b>Regulatory body</b>	Regulatory bodies make sure that organisations and service providers are following rules and laws.
<b>Relevant person</b>	<p>An adult whose ability to keep themselves safe from harm is seriously affected because they have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a physical disability, are frail, sick or injured;</li> <li>• an intellectual disability;</li> </ul>

Words to know	Meaning
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a mental disorder such as a mental illness or dementia; or</li> <li>• autism (called “autism spectrum disorder” in the law).</li> </ul>
<b>Relevant premises</b>	<p>These are places like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• residential centres for older people and adults with disabilities;</li> <li>• hospitals, hospices, and other centres that provide physical services to adults;</li> <li>• residential centres for people with mental disorders;</li> <li>• international protection accommodation centres;</li> <li>• domestic, sexual or gender-based violence centres; and</li> <li>• places where day services are provided to older adults or adults with disabilities.</li> </ul>
<b>Relevant service</b>	<p>Certain people or organisations who work with or provide services to adults, including at-risk adults.</p>
<b>Reportable harm</b>	<p>A type of harm that has a significant impact on an at-risk adult’s health, safety, or well-being.</p> <p>It includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sexual abuse of an at-risk adult, or</li> <li>• serious financial abuse of an at-risk adult.</li> </ul>



Words to know	Meaning
	<p><b>Note:</b> We decided that a different definition to the general civil definition – explained above under <b>Harm (in civil law)</b> – is needed for the type of harm that must be reported when someone suspects that an at-risk adult is being abused or neglected.</p>
<b>Risk assessment</b>	A decision made by someone in charge that says how likely something bad is to happen.
<b>Right to a good name</b>	A right that says that people can protect their reputation and be free from false and damaging statements about them.
<b>Right to associate</b>	A right that says that people are free to join groups with each other and to spend time with whoever they want.
<b>Right to bodily integrity</b>	A right that says that everyone has control over their own body and what happens to it.
<b>Right to be treated equally by the law</b>	A right that says that the law cannot treat people differently from each other for no good reason. This does not mean that every person must be treated exactly the same. The government can treat people differently if there is a good reason to do so.
<b>Right to dignity</b>	A right that says that people must be treated with respect in all aspects of their lives.
<b>Right to privacy</b>	A right that says that people have the right to be left alone and to have their own personal space.

Words to know	Meaning
<b>Right to private property</b>	A right that says that the government cannot take away a person's property without a good reason.
<b>Right to be protected as a person</b>	A right that protects a person's physical, mental, and emotional well-being.
<b>Right to security of the home</b>	A right that says that a person's home is their safe space. This means that the Gardaí and other public bodies cannot usually enter a person's home without the person's permission or a power to enter that is provided by a law.
<b>Right to fair procedures</b>	A right that says when a decision is made that affects you it should be made fairly.
<b>Rights of the family</b>	A right that says that the government cannot usually interfere with the family and their private decisions.
<b>Right to work and the right to earn a living</b>	A right that says that a person can look for work and make money.
<b>Safeguarding</b>	<p>Taking actions to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reduce the risk of harm to at-risk adults;</li> <li>• protect their rights;</li> <li>• look after their health, safety and well-being; and</li> <li>• help them keep themselves safe.ك</li> </ul>

Words to know	Meaning
<b>Safeguarding body</b>	The organisation that we think should be responsible for adult safeguarding in Ireland. The main function of the Safeguarding Body should be to promote the health, safety, and well-being of at-risk adults.
<b>Safeguarding plan</b>	<p>A document that sets out the steps that need to be taken to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• improve an at-risk adult’s health, safety or well-being;</li> <li>• reduce the risk of harm to them; and</li> <li>• help them keep themselves safe.</li> </ul>
<b>Safeguarding statement</b>	This statement should set out how a provider of relevant services intends to prevent harm to adults receiving the services, who are or may be at-risk adults.
<b>Safety order</b>	An order made by a court that stops a person from engaging in violent behaviour. People who are married, people in a romantic relationship, parents of adult children, and family members who live with each other can apply for these types of orders.

Words to know	Meaning
<b>Self-neglect</b>	When a person does not take proper care of their own basic needs and this seriously affects their well-being.
<b>Serious harm (in criminal law)</b>	<p>This includes any injury that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• creates a big risk of death;</li> <li>• is psychological and has a significant impact;</li> <li>• causes serious loss of function or changes to the body.</li> </ul> <p><b>Note:</b> for crimes that involve serious harm we talk about a "relevant person" instead of an "at-risk adult". We use "relevant person" because it's important for the criminal law to be precise about who is protected by the law. The definition of "relevant person" is narrower and more specific than the definition of "at-risk adult".</p>

<b>Serious Incident Review (in Chapter 17, called adult safeguarding reviews)</b>	<p>This is an investigation that happens when something goes wrong in a health or social care setting.</p> <p>The purpose of a serious incident review is to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• find out what happened;</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• find out how it happened;</li> <li>• find out what can be done differently to stop it happening again.</li> </ul>
<b>Theft</b>	When a person takes another person's property without the other person agreeing.
<b>Undue influence</b>	When someone pressurises another person to do something that is not in their best interests.
<b>Universal mandatory reporting</b>	A model of reporting that requires every person to report an incident when they are aware of it. This model does not allow people to decide if they should report incidents or not.
<b>Vetting</b>	This is when somebody checks to see if a person has a criminal record or if there is anything else they should be worried about. Vetting is usually done when a person applies to work with children or at-risk adults.
<b>Warrant</b>	Written authorisation from the court to do something – usually, to enter someone's home.





The Law Reform Commission is an independent statutory body established by the Law Reform Commission Act 1975. The Commission's principal role is to keep the law under review and to make proposals for reform, in particular by recommending the enactment of legislation to clarify and modernise the law.

The Commission's law reform role is carried out primarily under a Programme of Law Reform. Its Fifth Programme of Law Reform was prepared by the Commission following broad consultation and discussion. In accordance with the 1975 Act it was approved by the Government in March 2019 and placed before both Houses of the Oireachtas. The Commission also works on specific matters referred to it by the Attorney General under the 1975 Act.

The Commission's Access to Legislation work makes legislation more accessible online to the public. This includes the Legislation Directory (an electronically searchable index of amendments to Acts and statutory instruments), a selection of Revised Acts (Acts in their amended form rather than as enacted) and the Classified List of Legislation in Ireland (a list of Acts in force organised under 36 subject matter headings).