

# WITNESS SUPPORT PROGRAMME

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# WITNESS SUPPORT PROGRAMME

## INTRODUCTION

The Witness Support Programme<sup>1</sup> provides support to vulnerable witnesses in criminal cases who have to give their evidence in Court against their perpetrator(s), namely the accused person(s).

The Programme is conducted by volunteers from Social Service Agencies (SSA) such as the Singapore Children's Society and the Community Justice Centre.

The support to the witness under this Programme is through a Volunteer Support Person (VSP). The VSP is a volunteer recruited by the SSAs.

The Programme is coordinated and managed by the State Courts and is free of charge.

## Who is a vulnerable witness?

The Programme provides emotional support to vulnerable witnesses who are required to give evidence in Court. They are defined as:

- > Children below 18 years old or adults with mental capacities assessed to be below the age of 18;
- > Elderly victims above 65 years old;
- > Witnesses diagnosed with mental health issues;
- > Witnesses who may have been traumatised as a result of the alleged offences (e.g. violence-related and/or sexual offences);
- > Witnesses who appear to be in acute emotional distress during a trial

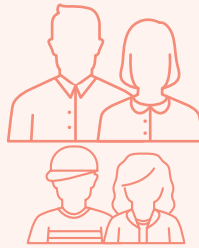
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<sup>1</sup> The Witness Support Programme supercedes the Vulnerable Witness Support Programme.

## How does the Programme work?

### Witnesses who are

- > Children below 18 years old or adults with mental capacities assessed to be below the age of 18;
- > Elderly victims above 65 years old;
- > Witnesses diagnosed with mental health issues;



- > Witnesses who may have been traumatised as a result of the alleged offences (e.g. violence-related and/or sexual offences);
- > Witnesses who appear to be in acute emotional distress during a trial

**Investigation Officer/Prosecutor/Defence Counsel** will identify suitable cases, download the consent form from [www.judiciary.gov.sg/forms/forms-details/wsp-referral](http://www.judiciary.gov.sg/forms/forms-details/wsp-referral) and seek the consent of the witness' parents/guardian/caregiver.



**Investigation Officer/Prosecutor/Defence Counsel** will email the completed consent form to the State Courts.



The **State Courts** will refer the appropriate cases to the appropriate SSA. A suitable VSP will be assigned based on the needs of the witness.

The **VSP** assigned to the witness will contact the witness or his/her parents/guardian/caregiver (where applicable).

The **VSP** will arrange for the witness to visit the State Courts to familiarise him/her with the environment and brief him/her on the court procedures.

## **What to expect if you are a vulnerable witness under the Programme**

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- > A visit to the State Courts (accompanied by the VSP), followed by a briefing to familiarise you with the environment and court procedures during the trial.
- > A supportive relationship between you and the VSP, who works on building a rapport with you and/or your parents, guardians or caregivers.
- > The VSP will be a source of information on court procedures and will help you manage the stress which may arise from the court proceedings.
- > Having the support of a VSP sitting behind you in open court or when you give evidence via video-link in a witness room, during the period of the trial. This is only if the Judge allows the VSP to do so upon the application of the prosecutor or defence counsel.
- > Having continued emotional support from the VSP, regardless of the outcome of the case.

## **What not to expect from the Programme**

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- > Evidence pertaining to the trial shall not be discussed between the VSP and you, or your parents, guardians or caregivers.
- > The VSP shall not provide any legal advice. If you require any legal advice, you may visit the Community Justice Centre, located at Level B1 of the State Courts, to speak with a volunteer lawyer.
- > The VSP shall not provide counselling or post-trauma treatment, either before or during the trial. However, where appropriate, the SSA may refer you to the appropriate agencies for counselling or post-trauma treatment, after the trial concludes.

## **If you meet the criteria for the Programme**

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- > Please speak to the Investigation Officer for your case so that he/she may make the referral to the State Courts.

Disclaimer: This publication is produced for general information only and is not intended as substitution for legal advice. A lawyer should be consulted should you require legal advice on your case. The State Courts disclaim any and all liabilities arising from and in connection with the contents of this publication.

All information is correct as of **1 February 2022**.

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