SUNYATA
BUDDHIST CENTRE

Sunyata Retreat Centre Limited

Snaty, Sixmilebridge, Co. Clare, V95 EP80

Email: info@sunyatacentre.org | Website: www.sunyatacentre.org

CHILD SAFEGUARDING POLICY & PROCEDURES

Version 2026/1

Approved by the Board of Trustees	5th November 2026
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Version	2026/1

Key Safeguarding Contacts

Relevant Person	Sarah-Jane Burton
Designated Liaison Person (DLP)	Bryan Nestor
Deputy Designated Liaison Person	Anna Majchrzak
Child Safeguarding Email	childsafeguarding@sunyatacentre.org

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1. Purpose and Scope

Sunyata Buddhist Centre is committed to safeguarding the welfare, dignity and safety of every child who attends the Centre.

For the purposes of this policy, a child means a person under 18 years of age.

Sunyata is a Buddhist residential retreat and meditation centre. Children may attend Sunyata with their parents or guardians in connection with Family Camp, family or community events, meditation activities, residential stays and other Centre activities.

Sunyata does not operate as a childcare service. Parents and guardians remain primarily responsible for the care, supervision and welfare of their children while at Sunyata.

During designated Family Camp activities, appropriately selected and Garda-vetted volunteers may assist parents with the supervision of children. This does not transfer overall parental responsibility to Sunyata or to the volunteer.

This policy applies to the Board of Trustees, employees, volunteers, teachers, retreat leaders, visiting monastics and any other person acting on behalf of Sunyata or undertaking an authorised role involving children.

It should be read alongside Sunyata's Child Safeguarding Statement, safeguarding risk assessment, Code of Conduct, Recruitment Policy, Complaints Procedure and Informal Concerns Procedure.

This policy has been prepared with regard to the Children First Act 2015, Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children, Tusla guidance and other applicable Irish legislation and safeguarding requirements.

2. Safeguarding Principles

Sunyata's approach to safeguarding is based on the following principles:

- the welfare and safety of the child are paramount;
- children will be treated with dignity, compassion and respect;
- children have a right to be heard and taken seriously;
- safeguarding is a responsibility shared by everyone involved in the Centre;
- parents and guardians have primary responsibility for their children;
- concerns about a child's welfare will be acted upon and will not be ignored because no formal complaint has been made;
- information concerning children will be handled sensitively and shared only where appropriate;
- safeguarding concerns will be dealt with fairly, promptly and without unnecessary investigation by Sunyata;
- no religious, spiritual, cultural, personal or organisational consideration takes precedence over the safety and welfare of a child.

3. Safeguarding Responsibilities at Sunyata

3.1 Board of Trustees

The Board has overall governance responsibility for child safeguarding within Sunyata.

- ensure that Sunyata complies with its organisational safeguarding obligations;
- approve and periodically review this policy, the Child Safeguarding Statement and associated risk assessment;
- appoint a Relevant Person, DLP and Deputy DLP;
- ensure appropriate safeguarding training and information are available;
- ensure appropriate recruitment, selection and Garda-vetting arrangements are maintained;
- ensure that suitable systems exist for confidential safeguarding records;
- ensure safeguarding concerns involving people associated with Sunyata are addressed appropriately;
- take organisational, employment or volunteer-management decisions where necessary;
- ensure conflicts of interest are appropriately managed.

The Board is not the routine recipient or investigator of individual safeguarding cases. Identifiable safeguarding information will only be provided to trustees where they have a legitimate need for that information in order to carry out their governance responsibilities.

4. Relevant Person

Relevant Person: Sarah-Jane Burton

The Relevant Person is the person appointed by Sunyata to act as the first point of contact in relation to the Centre's Child Safeguarding Statement.

The Relevant Person will:

- act as the point of contact concerning the Child Safeguarding Statement;
- facilitate access to the Statement where required;
- deal with enquiries relating to its operation;
- support the Board in keeping the Statement and associated risk assessment under review.

The Relevant Person and DLP may be the same individual, but they are separate functions.

5. Designated Liaison Person (DLP)

DLP: Bryan Nestor

The DLP is Sunyata's principal operational point of contact for child protection and welfare concerns. Anyone associated with or attending Sunyata may bring a concern about the welfare or safety of a child to the DLP.

The DLP will:

- be familiar with Sunyata's responsibilities under Children First and this policy;
- receive child protection and welfare concerns;
- ensure immediate safety issues are addressed;
- consider whether reasonable grounds for concern exist;
- seek advice from Tusla where appropriate;
- ensure appropriate reports are made to Tusla;
- liaise with Tusla and An Garda Síochána where appropriate;
- communicate with parents or guardians where appropriate;
- maintain factual records of concerns, decisions, consultations and actions;
- record reasons where a concern is not reported;
- ensure safeguarding records are securely maintained;
- provide appropriate feedback to the person who raised a concern;
- liaise with any mandated person involved in a concern;
- ensure safeguarding matters are brought to the Chair or Board where organisational action is required, while limiting identifying information to what is necessary.

The DLP does not conduct a child-abuse investigation. Investigation and statutory child-protection assessment are matters for the appropriate statutory authorities.

6. Deputy Designated Liaison Person

Deputy DLP: Anna Majchrzak

The Deputy DLP will be sufficiently informed, trained and authorised to undertake the DLP's functions when required.

The Deputy DLP will:

- act when the DLP is unavailable;
- have appropriate access to safeguarding systems and records necessary to deputise effectively;
- receive concerns where the DLP cannot be contacted;
- act where a conflict of interest prevents the DLP dealing with a matter;
- assist with safeguarding administration and continuity as agreed.

Where a concern relates to the DLP, it should normally be brought to the Deputy DLP. Where a concern involves both the DLP and Deputy DLP, or circumstances make referral to either inappropriate, it should be brought directly to the Chair of the Board or reported directly to Tusla or An Garda Síochána where appropriate.

7. Role of the Chair

The Chair has a governance and organisational role in safeguarding but does not routinely manage safeguarding cases.

The Chair will be informed of safeguarding matters to the extent necessary for organisational oversight and decision-making.

The Chair may become directly involved where:

- an allegation concerns the DLP or Deputy DLP;
- an allegation concerns a trustee, employee, volunteer, teacher, visiting monastic or another person associated with Sunyata and organisational action may be required;
- a significant conflict of interest exists;
- an immediate Board-level decision is necessary.

Access to identifiable safeguarding records will remain restricted to the DLP and Deputy DLP, with access provided to the Chair or another trustee only where necessary for the performance of their responsibilities.

8. Responsibilities of Everyone Acting for Sunyata

Board members, employees, volunteers, teachers, visiting monastics and others acting on behalf of Sunyata must:

- follow this policy and Sunyata's safeguarding arrangements;
- maintain appropriate boundaries with children;
- remain alert to child protection or welfare concerns;
- respond appropriately if a child makes a disclosure;
- report concerns promptly to the DLP or Deputy DLP;
- provide an accurate factual account of what they observed, heard or were told;
- maintain confidentiality;
- cooperate appropriately with safeguarding procedures.

They must not investigate suspected abuse themselves, confront an alleged perpetrator on their own initiative or attempt to determine whether a child's account is true.

9. Parents and Guardians

Parents and guardians remain primarily responsible for their children's care, safety and supervision throughout their time at Sunyata.

Parents and guardians are expected to:

- ensure children are appropriately supervised;
- communicate relevant needs or safety information;
- maintain appropriate boundaries for their children;
- ensure children understand relevant safety rules;
- cooperate with reasonable safeguarding arrangements;
- provide consent where required for activities, outings, transport or photography.

Sunyata may intervene where it reasonably considers a child's safety or welfare to be at risk, regardless of parental responsibility.

10. Recognising Child Protection and Welfare Concerns

Child protection or welfare concerns may arise from:

- something a child says or discloses;
- something witnessed by another person;

- injuries, behaviour or circumstances giving rise to concern;
- information provided by another adult or child;
- concerns about neglect;
- concerns regarding physical, emotional or sexual abuse;
- bullying or harmful behaviour between children;
- behaviour by an adult towards a child that breaches appropriate boundaries;
- information about historical abuse where children may currently be at risk;
- a pattern of smaller concerns which, taken together, gives rise to a safeguarding concern.

Sunyata does not expect volunteers or other people associated with the Centre to diagnose abuse or determine whether abuse has occurred. Detailed descriptions and indicators of different forms of abuse belong primarily in safeguarding training and current Children First/Tusla guidance rather than being reproduced extensively in this policy. A person needs only to raise the concern. The DLP will determine the appropriate next steps.

11. Responding to a Disclosure by a Child

Where a child discloses possible abuse or harm, the person receiving the disclosure should:

- remain calm;
- listen carefully;
- take the child seriously;
- allow the child to speak in their own words and at their own pace;
- avoid expressing shock, disbelief or judgement;
- not promise secrecy;
- explain, in an age-appropriate way, that the information may need to be shared with people who can help;
- ask only questions necessary to clarify what the child is saying;
- avoid leading questions or attempting to investigate;
- reassure the child that telling someone was the right thing to do;
- make a factual written record as soon as practicable, including the child's own words where possible;
- inform the DLP or Deputy DLP promptly.

Where immediate protective action is required, protecting the child takes priority over completing documentation.

12. Reporting Child Protection and Welfare Concerns

A concern should normally be brought promptly to the DLP or, if unavailable, the Deputy DLP.

The DLP will consider the information in accordance with Children First and current Tusla guidance. A person does not need to prove that abuse occurred before reporting a concern.

Where reasonable grounds for concern exist, the concern will be reported to Tusla. Where the DLP is uncertain whether the reporting threshold is met, the DLP may seek advice from the relevant Tusla Duty Social Work Service.

The person who originally raised the concern retains the right to make a report directly to Tusla. No Sunyata procedure prevents any person from contacting Tusla or An Garda Síochána directly.

12.1 Reporting to Tusla

For a current concern involving a child under 18, the current Child Protection and Welfare Report Form (CPWRF) should normally be used.

Reports should preferably be submitted through the secure Tusla Portal. Completed Tusla report forms must not be sent by ordinary email. Current forms and reporting routes should always be obtained from Tusla.

Sunyata's **childsafeguarding@sunyatacentre.org** address is an internal safeguarding contact. It is not a substitute for making a required report to Tusla.

13. Immediate Danger

Where there is an immediate concern for a child's safety, administrative procedures must not delay protective action.

Tusla should be contacted urgently where appropriate. Where a child appears to be in immediate danger and Tusla cannot be contacted, An Garda Síochána should be contacted without delay.

A child must not knowingly be left in circumstances exposing them to immediate harm merely while awaiting completion of a report or internal decision.

14. Parents and Guardians When a Report Is Being Considered

Where appropriate, parents or guardians should be informed that a concern is being reported to Tusla and the reasons for doing so.

However, they should not be informed where doing so could:

- ➢ place the child at further risk;
- ➢ place the reporter or another person at risk;
- ➢ interfere with Tusla's assessment or another statutory investigation.

Where the DLP is uncertain whether informing a parent or guardian is appropriate, advice should be sought from Tusla.

15. Where a Decision Is Made Not to Report

Where the DLP determines that a concern does not meet the threshold for reporting to Tusla:

- the concern will still be recorded;
- the reasons for the decision will be recorded;
- any other action taken will be recorded;
- the person who raised the concern will receive an appropriate explanation;
- they will be informed that they remain free to contact Tusla directly if they continue to have concerns.

A concern that does not reach the threshold for a Tusla report may nevertheless require action by Sunyata, for example where it concerns inappropriate behaviour, poor practice, unsafe boundaries or a breach of the Code of Conduct.

16. Mandated Persons

A mandated person is a person falling within a category specified in Schedule 2 of the Children First Act 2015.

Being a mandated person by profession does not automatically make an individual a mandated person for every concern encountered at Sunyata. The statutory reporting obligation relates to relevant information acquired in the course of the person's employment or profession as such a mandated person.

Accordingly, Sunyata will not designate someone as a mandated person merely because they happen to hold a profession listed in Schedule 2 outside their role at the Centre.

Sunyata will maintain an internal list of persons, if any, who are mandated persons within the relevant service. Where there are currently no such persons, the internal register may record: None currently identified.

The position will be reviewed when relevant personnel or roles change.

Where a person does have an individual statutory reporting obligation, that obligation belongs to the mandated person and cannot simply be transferred to the DLP. A joint report may be made where appropriate.

17. Retrospective Disclosures of Childhood Abuse

An adult may disclose abuse that occurred during their childhood.

The immediate consideration is whether the information indicates that a child may currently be at risk from the alleged perpetrator. The DLP should be informed where such a possibility exists.

The current Tusla Retrospective Abuse Report Form (RARF) should be used where appropriate.

The wishes and privacy of the adult making the disclosure will be treated sensitively, but a potential present risk to children cannot be ignored solely because the adult does not wish to make a complaint.

18. Allegations Concerning Someone Associated with Sunyata

An allegation or safeguarding concern may involve a trustee, employee, volunteer, teacher, visiting monastic, retreat leader or another person associated with Sunyata.

The child's safety is the first consideration.

Two separate processes may then be required:

1. Child safeguarding/reporting process - managed by the DLP or Deputy DLP in accordance with this policy and Children First.

2. Sunyata organisational process - managed separately by the appropriate uninvolved trustee(s) or other authorised person in relation to employment, volunteering, teaching, access to the Centre or other organisational matters.

Sunyata may take proportionate interim protective measures while a concern is being assessed. Such measures may include altering duties, restricting contact with children or temporarily suspending participation in particular activities. An interim protective measure does not constitute a finding of wrongdoing.

The person concerned will be treated fairly and informed of an allegation to the extent and at the time appropriate, having regard to child safety and any Tusla or Garda process. Sunyata will not conduct an internal process in a manner that could prejudice or interfere with a statutory investigation. Conflicts of interest must be declared and appropriately managed.

19. Safe Recruitment and Garda Vetting

Sunyata will take reasonable steps to ensure that people undertaking roles involving children are suitable for those roles.

Recruitment and selection will be proportionate to the responsibilities involved and will include Garda vetting where required by law or by Sunyata's safeguarding arrangements.

Regardless of whether Garda vetting would independently be required for every volunteer role under the National Vetting Bureau legislation, Sunyata requires every volunteer authorised to supervise or assist in supervising children during Family Camp to have completed Garda vetting before undertaking that role.

A person who has not completed the required vetting must not undertake such supervision.

Garda vetting is one safeguarding measure and does not replace appropriate selection, references, boundaries, supervision or safeguarding procedures.

20. Family Camp and Supervision

Family Camp is a setting in which children are particularly present within Sunyata and therefore requires clear safeguarding arrangements.

Parents or guardians remain responsible for their children throughout Family Camp.

Sunyata may arrange activities in which Garda-vetted volunteers assist parents with children's supervision. Such assistance does not constitute a transfer of overall parental responsibility.

Sunyata does not operate children's sessions independently of parental responsibility or provide a childcare service.

Parents, guardians and authorised volunteers should communicate clearly about who is supervising children so that a child is not inadvertently left unattended.

Children must not be permitted to use dangerous equipment or enter areas where maintenance, construction or other hazards make access unsuitable.

21. One-to-One Contact

Sunyata does not arrange one-to-one meetings or activities between children and teachers, visiting monastics, retreat leaders or other adults acting for the Centre.

Where interaction between an adult and child occurs naturally during a Centre activity, it should take place in an open and observable environment wherever practicable.

Adults must not deliberately create unnecessary opportunities to be isolated with a child.

Teachers and visiting monastics do not meet children individually as part of Sunyata's activities.

Where exceptional circumstances require an adult to assist a child, the child's parent or guardian should be involved wherever practicable.

22. Physical Contact and Intimate Care

Physical contact with a child must always be appropriate to the child's age, circumstances and needs.

Contact should:

- be appropriate and non-secretive;
- respect the child's personal space and dignity;
- never be imposed where a child indicates discomfort or resistance;
- be for the child's benefit rather than the adult's;
- occur in an observable context wherever practicable.

Appropriate comfort may be offered to a distressed child, particularly where initiated or clearly welcomed by the child. Parents or guardians retain responsibility for intimate care. Sunyata volunteers do not change babies' nappies. Where a young child requires toileting or other intimate assistance, the child's parent or guardian should normally be sought.

23. Residential Arrangements

Children staying overnight at Sunyata stay as part of their family arrangement.

Sunyata does not operate children's dormitories.

One family is accommodated per bedroom unless an alternative arrangement involving members of the same family has been specifically agreed with the parent or guardian and is appropriate.

Children are not accommodated alone with unrelated adult volunteers, teachers, monastics or retreat participants.

Normal safeguarding boundaries continue to apply throughout residential stays, including outside organised activity times.

24. Outings, Walks and Activities Away from the Centre

A child must not be taken away from the Centre for an activity or walk without the knowledge and consent of their parent or guardian.

For organised group outings involving children, appropriate adult supervision will be arranged having regard to the activity, children's ages and circumstances.

Where appropriate:

- ➔ a charged mobile phone will be available;
- ➔ suitable first-aid provision will accompany the group;
- ➔ the responsible adults will know which children are participating;
- ➔ parents or guardians will know the nature and expected duration of the activity.

25. Transporting Children

Children may occasionally be transported in connection with a Sunyata activity.

A child will not be transported as part of a Sunyata activity without the knowledge and consent of their parent or guardian.

The parent or guardian, or a specifically appointed and appropriate supervisor, will accompany the child or children.

Normal legal requirements concerning vehicle safety, seatbelts and appropriate child restraints must be observed.

Transport arrangements should avoid unnecessary situations in which an unrelated adult is alone in a vehicle with a child.

26. Photography, Video and Digital Communication

Photographs or video recordings of children must not be taken by or on behalf of Sunyata without appropriate parental or guardian consent.

A child's dignity must always be respected. Images must not be taken in circumstances in which a child is inappropriately dressed, distressed or otherwise placed in a compromising situation.

Consent for publication is separate from simply taking an image.

Images identifying children must not be published on Sunyata's website, social media or promotional material without appropriate consent.

Children should not ordinarily be identified by full name alongside publicly published images.

Adults acting on behalf of Sunyata should not establish unnecessary private digital relationships with children or use private messaging or social media to create one-to-one relationships outside appropriate Centre activities.

Communication concerning a child should normally take place through their parent or guardian.

27. Visitors, Teachers and Visiting Monastics

The presence of teachers, monastics or other visitors at a Buddhist centre does not remove the need for normal safeguarding boundaries.

Visiting teachers and monastics do not automatically have responsibility for supervising children.

They should not:

- arrange private one-to-one meetings with children;
- assume responsibility for children without an agreed safeguarding arrangement;
- establish private communications with children outside appropriate Centre activities;
- use religious or spiritual authority to override a child's boundaries or parental responsibility.

Parents remain responsible for their children in ordinary interactions with teachers, monastics, retreatants and visitors. Where a visiting person is specifically given a role involving children, Sunyata will first determine what safeguarding, recruitment and vetting requirements apply to that role.

28. Bullying and Harmful Behaviour Between Children

Safeguarding concerns may arise from the behaviour of another child as well as an adult.

Bullying, violence, sexualised behaviour or other harmful conduct between children will not be dismissed merely as conflict between children.

The welfare of all children involved will be considered.

Parents or guardians will normally be involved, subject to safeguarding considerations.

Where behaviour gives rise to a child protection concern, the normal reporting procedure under this policy applies.

29. Informal Concerns

A safeguarding concern does not have to be submitted as a formal complaint before Sunyata can act upon it.

Information received informally may reveal:

- a child welfare concern;
- unsafe practice;
- inappropriate boundaries;
- a breach of the Code of Conduct;

- a pattern of behaviour;
- information requiring referral to the DLP.

Where an informal concern involves a child, safeguarding considerations take priority over the ordinary Informal Concerns or Complaints processes. A person's request that nothing be done cannot prevent necessary safeguarding action.

30. Safeguarding Records

Sunyata will maintain appropriate records of child protection and welfare concerns, including concerns that do not result in a report to Tusla.

Records should be:

- factual;
- dated;
- sufficiently detailed to explain the concern and action taken;
- clear about what was observed directly and what was reported by someone else;
- clear about decisions and the reasons for them;
- updated with significant subsequent actions or communications.

Where a child makes a disclosure, their actual words should be recorded as accurately as possible. The DLP is responsible for the safeguarding record system, with the Deputy DLP having sufficient access to perform the deputy function.

31. Confidentiality and Secure Storage

Child safeguarding records are highly confidential.

Information will be shared only on a need-to-know basis for safeguarding, legal or legitimate governance purposes.

No promise of absolute secrecy may be given in relation to a child safeguarding concern.

Electronic safeguarding records will be stored within Sunyata's designated restricted safeguarding system and not within ordinary shared administrative folders.

Access will normally be restricted to the DLP and Deputy DLP.

The Chair or another trustee will receive identifiable information only where necessary for an organisational or governance function.

The child safeguarding email account will:

- be used for safeguarding purposes rather than general administration;
- be accessible to the DLP and Deputy DLP according to their respective roles;
- use a strong unique password and multi-factor authentication;
- not automatically forward safeguarding messages to personal or general Sunyata email accounts;
- not be configured on personal mobile phones;
- be accessed through approved secure devices and a trusted or secure network.

Administrative or technical ability to access a system does not itself authorise access to safeguarding information. Any exceptional technical access required for business continuity should be necessary, proportionate and documented.

32. Safeguarding Training

The DLP and Deputy DLP will maintain appropriate knowledge of their safeguarding responsibilities.

Board members, employees and volunteers will receive safeguarding information or training appropriate to their role.

Anyone authorised to supervise or assist with supervising children during Family Camp must receive appropriate safeguarding information before undertaking that role.

Sunyata may use Tusla's Children First training and other suitable safeguarding resources.

This policy does not reproduce comprehensive safeguarding training material. Training should be based on current official guidance rather than relying solely upon the policy document.

33. Child Safeguarding Statement and Risk Assessment

Sunyata will maintain a Child Safeguarding Statement and written safeguarding risk assessment appropriate to the actual services and activities it provides.

The assessment will consider risks including:

- harm by someone acting for or associated with Sunyata;
- harm from another adult attending the Centre;
- harmful behaviour between children;
- inadequate supervision;
- inappropriate one-to-one contact;
- residential arrangements;
- outings and transport;
- inappropriate physical contact;
- photography and digital communication;
- inappropriate spiritual or religious boundaries;
- unsuitable persons supervising children;
- failure to recognise or report safeguarding concerns;
- failure to respond appropriately to allegations.

The Board will ensure that identified risks have appropriate safeguards.

34. Safeguarding Email and Contact Arrangements

Sunyata maintains a dedicated confidential child safeguarding contact:

childsafeguarding@sunyatacentre.org

This address is monitored by the DLP and Deputy DLP in accordance with Sunyata's secure-access arrangements.

It may be used to bring a child safeguarding concern to Sunyata's attention.

It must not be relied upon as the sole means of communication where a child may be in immediate danger.

It is also not a method for submitting a CPWRF or RARF to Tusla.

35. Governance Reporting

The Board should receive sufficient information to satisfy itself that Sunyata's safeguarding arrangements are functioning properly.

This may include non-identifying information concerning:

- whether safeguarding concerns have arisen;
- whether required procedures were followed;
- whether reports were made to statutory authorities;
- training and vetting status;
- identified safeguarding risks;
- policy or procedural improvements required.

Routine Board oversight does not require circulation of individual safeguarding files. Where a particular case requires Board action, information will be provided only to those trustees who need it for that purpose.

36. Review and Implementation

The Board of Trustees is responsible for ensuring this policy is implemented.

The policy will be reviewed at least every 24 months, and sooner where:

- there is a material change in Sunyata's activities;
- safeguarding arrangements or responsible persons change significantly;
- legislation or national guidance changes;
- a safeguarding matter identifies a weakness in the existing procedure;
- the safeguarding risk assessment identifies a new or materially changed risk.

The Relevant Person, DLP and Deputy DLP appointments and contact details will be kept current. The mandated-person register will be reviewed when relevant personnel or roles change and as part of safeguarding review. The Child Safeguarding Statement and risk assessment will be reviewed alongside this policy where appropriate.

37. Related Sunyata Documents

This policy should be read together with:

- Child Safeguarding Statement including Child Safeguarding Risk Assessment;
- Code of Conduct;
- Recruitment Policy;
- Garda Vetting arrangements;
- Informal Concerns Procedure;

- Complaints Procedure;
- Privacy and Data Protection procedures;
- Mandated Persons Register.

Current Tusla forms and guidance should be accessed from:

Tusla https://www.tusla.ie/children-first/publications-and-forms/

rather than attaching static copies to this policy, reducing the risk of an obsolete form remaining in circulation.

Approval

Chair: Sarah-Jane Burton

Signature: Sarah-Jane Burton

Date: 09 November 2026

Next review: September 2028