

Safe Environment Refresher Training – Diocese of Savannah

(This document must be reviewed, signed, and submitted to your diocesan parish/school/outreach center every five years in order to maintain your certification to minister to minors in the diocese).

The Charter

The Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People was created by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) following their meeting in Dallas, Texas in 2002 to address the ongoing sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church. The *Charter* is the Bishops' "Promise to Protect, Pledge to Heal." It establishes a template of actions/policies for every diocese to follow in an effort to create and maintain safe environments for minors throughout each diocese.

Among the actions included in the *Charter*, every diocese is required to certify adult employees and volunteers who interact with minors in the discharge of their ministries. Examples of adults requiring certification: priests, deacons, religious sisters and brothers, seminarians, diaconal candidates, teachers, religious education instructors, paraprofessionals, counselors, school nurses, coaches, ushers, Eucharistic ministers, music directors, altar service trainers, youth ministers & aides, church or school sponsored scout leaders & aides, chaperones, lunchroom & recess volunteers, nursery & other school care staff, any other adult employee/volunteer identified by the pastor/principal/agency director.

Regardless of the diocese, every adult must meet the following three requirements to be certified to minister to minors: ***receive safe environment training, undergo a criminal background check, and read/sign the diocesan code of conduct.***

To ensure dioceses are complying with provisions of the *Charter*, every diocese in the United States is subjected to an annual Compliance Audit conducted by an outside auditing agency at the direction of the USCCB. The results of these annual audits are posted on the USCCB website every Spring.

Certification Requirements

Training

In the Diocese of Savannah the required safe environment training program is the VIRTUS *Protecting God's Children for Adults* program. Attendance at VIRTUS training is required of every employee/volunteer age 18 or over whose ministry involves interaction with minors. In addition to attending training, each individual is required to register their attendance online at the VIRTUS website (www.virtus.org). **Registering online is the act which creates an individual's VIRTUS account.** This account also establishes a repository for the individual's background check completion date and code of conduct signature date.

Attendance at this training is a one-time requirement (followed by an every five year refresher). If an individual comes into the Diocese of Savannah from another diocese, which also uses the same VIRTUS program, the individual's VIRTUS account is transferred to Savannah and no additional training is required. If an individual from another diocese received training from a different training program their certification is temporarily accepted until such time as their attendance at a VIRTUS training is completed. The new (VIRTUS) training should be accomplished as soon as possible.

This Safe Environment Refresher Training document must be read and signed every five years. The signature page will be maintained by the parish/school/outreach center.

Criminal Background Check

The criminal background check is required to be conducted every five years to maintain certification, although under certain circumstances, particularly in the Catholic Schools system, more frequent checks may be required. The diocese will accept background checks from law enforcement agencies, recognized commercial vendors, or background checks from an individual's employer as long as it is less than five years old. Parishes/schools/outreach centers of the diocese will maintain background check authorization forms of individuals for whom they conducted background checks.

Code of Conduct

The diocesan ***Code of Conduct for Those Working with Minors*** is required reading as part of the certification process. The last page of this code requires the reader to sign and date the document certifying they have read and understood the requirements of this code. The signature page will be maintained by the parish/school/outreach center.

Safe Environment Training for Minors

Although not included as a requirement in the original Charter, diocesan schools and parishes are now required to offer safe environment training to all students enrolled in schools and religious education programs.

Three programs have been approved by Bishop Hartmayer for this purpose: *VIRTUS' Teaching Touching Safety; Child Lures; Good Touch Bad Touch*. *Good Touch Bad Touch* is the program of choice of the Georgia Department of Education for use in the Georgia public schools. If religious education class students are receiving the *Good Touch Bad Touch* program in their public school, this meets the diocesan safe environment education requirement.

Parents/guardians are offered the opportunity to have their child "opt-out" of this training, but must provide the school/parish with a signed form to this affect. Parents electing to have their child opt-out will be provided a training document to facilitate their responsibility to carry out this training. Parishes/schools will maintain signed opt-out forms provided by parents/guardians.

Child Sexual Abuse

Victims

Between 5 and 10 percent of adult men say they were molested as children, and the number is 20 percent of adult women. Studies estimate that in only 11 percent of cases is abuse committed by strangers, and one-third of the perpetrators are biological relatives of the victim. Further, an extensive study of sexual abuse reports received over an extended period of time in a large metropolitan area found that less than 5 percent of reports made by children were false. A national incident-based reporting system produced a report from law enforcement agencies of 12 states covering the period 1991-1996. This report indicates one of every three victims of sexual assault reported to law enforcement was under 12 years of age.

Indicators of Abuse

Victims exhibit a sudden change in their behavior.

Become moody or aggressive.
Lose interest in school or their grades.
Stop taking care of their personal hygiene.

Perpetrators

Many models explain different types of sexual molesters. The following is one such model:

Preferential offender: one who would rather have a child for a social, romantic and sexual partner than an adult.

Situational offender: one who does not necessarily prefer children but offends under a certain set of circumstances (when intoxicated, depressed, anxious).

Indiscriminate offender: one who will simply prey on any available vulnerable person (child, incapacitated adult, hospitalized teenager, elderly person).

A Plan to Protect

Step One – Know the Warning Signs of a perpetrator

Discourages other adults from participating or monitoring.
Always wants to be alone with young people.
More excited to be with children than adults.
Gives gifts to children, often without permission.
Goes overboard touching.
Always wants to wrestle or tickle.
Thinks the rules do not apply to them.
Allows young people to engage in activities their parents would not allow.
Uses bad language or tells dirty jokes to children.
Shows young people pornography.

Step Two –Control Access

Conduct criminal background checks on all adult employees/volunteers who minister to minors in parish/school functions, activities, etc.

Step Three – Monitor All Programs

All programs for children should be supervised.
Identify secluded areas.
Restrict children from staff-only areas.
Only meet with children where other adults can have open access.
Ensure enough adults are involved in programs.
Allow parents to have access to all programs.

Step Four – Be Aware

Know what is going on in the lives of your children (parents should talk, listen and observe).

Step Five – Communicate Your Concerns

Confront or tell someone when you are uncomfortable with a situation; discuss suspected abuse with a supervisor.

Technology

The reality is there is absolutely nothing that's private on the internet. The internet has become the new "playground" for many perpetrators. Children and teens should be encouraged to electronically communicate only with friends or people they know. As a parent or caring adult, you must be adamant that your children never give out personal information over the internet or physically meet anyone in person that they've communicated with only online.

Responsible adults have to become actively involved in how a child or teen uses technology. Take a look at your child or teen's cell phone and see who they are texting and what photos have been taken or are stored on the phone.

Improper use of communication devices such as the practice of **sexting** has created a whole new area of concern. In 2010 16 states enacted legislation addressing this issue and at least 21 additional states were considering bills or resolutions aimed at sexting. The result is that not only could there be a safety aspect to be considered, but a minor could be charged with a misdemeanor.

Reporting Sexual Abuse

Reports by a diocesan employee/volunteer should be made to their supervisor, or if a concern exists regarding the intended recipient of the report to respond accordingly, the reporter may instead report directly to the pastor/parochial administrator/principal as appropriate, or (if the concern rests with this individual) directly to the Director, Office for the Protection of Children and Young People or Superintendent, Catholic Schools Office as appropriate.

Effective July 1, 2012, Georgia House Bill 1176 expanded the mandatory reporting requirements to include child service organizations. Specifically, sub-paragraph(b)(5) of section 19-7-5 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated is amended as follows: "Child service organization personnel means persons employed by or volunteering at a business or organization, whether public, private, for profit, not for profit, or voluntary, that provides care, treatment, education, training, supervision, coaching, counseling, recreational programs, or shelter to children."

This new definition extends the mandatory reporting requirements to all employees and all volunteers. This includes parents, coaches, community volunteers, and board members of independent schools.

Beginning with the observation by the initial reporter, a continuous written log of events, actions taken and accompanying times will be maintained at the parish/school. Protocols established by the parish/Catholic Schools Office will be followed.

Reference Material

Detailed information concerning policies, procedures, instructions, and applicable forms relating to all safe environment actions are available at the website of the Office for the Protection of Children and Young People (www.diosav.org/chilyouthprotection).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I have read and understand the aforementioned Safe Environment Refresher Training material.

Name: _____

Position: _____

Name of parish, school, or institution: _____

City: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____