

Part One: Policies and Procedures

ARTICLE 3

Safe Environment Programs

On the Establishment of Safe Environment Programs

USCCB, *Essential Norms*, Preamble: ‘The bishops will work with parents, civil authorities, educators, and various organizations in the community to make and maintain the safest environment for minors.’

USCCB, *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*, §6: ‘There are to be clear and well-publicized diocesan/eparchial standards of ministerial behavior and appropriate boundaries for clergy and for any other paid personnel and volunteers of the church in positions of trust who have regular contact with children and young people’¹.

USCCB, *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*, §12:
‘Dioceses/eparchies are to maintain ‘safe environment’ programs which the diocesan/eparchial bishop deems to be in accord with Catholic moral principles. They are to be conducted cooperatively with parents, civil authorities, educators, and community organizations to provide education and training for children, youth, parents, ministers, educators, volunteers, and others about ways to make and maintain a safe environment for children and young people. Dioceses/eparchies are to make clear to clergy and all members of the community the standards of conduct for clergy and other persons in positions of trust with regard to children.’

USCCB, *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*, §13:
‘Dioceses/eparchies are to evaluate the background of all incardinated and non-incardinated priests and deacons who are engaged in ecclesiastical ministry in the diocese/eparchy and of all diocesan/eparchial and parish/school or other paid personnel and volunteers whose duties include ongoing, unsupervised contact with minors. Specifically, they are to utilize the resources of law enforcement and other community agencies. In addition, they are to employ adequate screening and evaluative techniques in deciding the fitness of candidates for ordination.’

¹ See Part Two of this document, the Code of Ethical Standards for Church Leaders.

Mandated Prevention and Education Programs

3.1 All clergy and parish, school, and diocesan personnel and volunteers who minister, work, or serve in a capacity involving contact with children under age eighteen (18) must complete the prevention and education programs mandated by the Diocese. These programs seek to assist parents in educating and protecting their children and to assist parishes, parish schools, and diocesan institutions to cooperate with parents in developing and maintaining safe and secure environments.

3.1.1 The Safe Environment Program Coordinator is to institute mandated prevention and education programs in parishes, parish schools, and diocesan institutions for preventing the sexual abuse of minors before it occurs and for identifying abuse once it has occurred.

3.1.2 The Safe Environment Program Coordinator is to maintain a list of the prevention and education programs approved by the Bishop. No person is to be permitted to minister, work, or serve in the Diocese in positions that require direct contact with children and young people without having completed the mandated prevention and education programs and appropriate training as outlined in these policies and procedures.

3.1.3 Personal safety programs for children and young people that include information about appropriate behavioral and physical boundaries between adults and children, and what to do if those boundaries are violated, are to be standard, permanent elements of Catholic education in the schools and parishes of the Diocese for all grades.

3.1.4 Similar personal safety programs for children and young people are to be taught in all parish religious education programs. The Office of the Word is to train all catechetical leaders in the programs for child and youth safety mandated by the Diocese. These leaders are to coordinate the Safe Environment Education Programs with the pastor/pastoral administrator of the parish.

3.1.5 The Safe Environment Program Coordinator is to establish school and parish environmental and reporting protocols to enhance the prevention of sexual abuse of minors on Church-owned property and at Church-sponsored events and activities and to ensure that the procedures for reporting allegations of abuse and neglect to civil and ecclesial authorities are clearly defined and understood.

Prevention and Education Programs for Adults

3.2 The prevention and education programs for adults are to work to prevent the sexual abuse of minors by raising awareness of the nature of abuse and its prevalence in all elements of society. Adults are to be trained to recognize the

signs and symptoms of sexual abuse and how to intervene when children and young people are at risk.

3.2.1 The prevention and education programs for adults are to focus on prevention strategies, raising awareness and understanding of abuse issues, and increasing the ability to deal effectively with sexual abuse issues once they arise. They are to include practical procedures for preventing sexual abuse of minors on Church-owned property and at Church-sponsored events and activities.

3.2.2 The prevention and education training in parishes, parish schools, and diocesan institutions are to include instruction in:

- these policies and procedures for the protection of children and young people, including the responsibility to report the sexual abuse of minors to civil authorities and the responsibility to report sexual abuse by clergy and diocesan and parish personnel and volunteers to ecclesiastical authorities;
- the nature of the sexual abuse of minors, signs and symptoms of abuse, types of disclosure, and how to respond appropriately;
- actions to take when a person has reasonable cause to suspect the sexual abuse of a minor and how to gather information appropriately;
- ministering to persons harmed by the sexual abuse of a minor;
- the standard school and parish Safe Environment protocol established by the Safe Environment Program Coordinator.

3.2.3 The Safe Environment Program Coordinator is to ensure that training in prevention and education is available for clergy and diocesan and parish personnel and volunteers who are new to the Diocese. The Pastor in each parish or cluster of parishes is to work with the Safe Environment Program Coordinator to ensure that the required training is provided.

Prevention and Education Programs for Children and Young People

3.3 prevention and education programs for children and young people are to emphasize basic skills for safety from dangerous or abusive situations. These programs focus on enhancing the ability of children and young people to protect themselves and on encouraging safe environments that allow them to communicate any potential endangerment.

3.3.1 The prevention and education programs for children and young people in diocesan or parish schools and religious education classes are to include an age-appropriate personal safety curriculum for students at all levels. Parents, teachers, and students are to be trained in personal safety skills and appropriate adult behavior toward children and young people.

3.3.2 The programs for children and young people are to utilize school and religious education programs to educate children and parents about personal safety and appropriate boundaries between children and adults. These programs

are to assist parents in educating and protecting their children.

3.3.3 The prevention and education programs taught to children are to include instruction on how to:

- communicate any concerns they may have;
- say ‘no’ to unwanted situations;
- identify trusted adults with whom to speak;
- recognize that abusive situations are never the fault of the child;
- recognize and disclose inappropriate or unwanted actions (including improper touching) directed to self or others.

Mandatory Background Checks

3.4 All clergy ministering in the diocese and all parish and diocesan personnel and volunteers must complete the background checks mandated by the Diocese. The Diocese requires full disclosure from all applicants for ministry, employment, or volunteer service in the Diocese. Applicants who refuse to provide authorization for background checks and inquiries will not be considered for any position in a parish, parish school, or diocesan institution.

3.4.1 All persons who apply for entrance into the seminary or permanent diaconate program, for incardination into or other ministry in the Diocese, for employment in a parish, parish school, or diocesan institution, who contract independently with the Diocese or a parish or school, or who wish to volunteer in a position involving regular contact with children under age eighteen (18) must complete the relevant application process mandated by the Diocese. This process may include, but is not limited to:

- completion of an application or permission form mandated by the Diocese
- signed ‘Acknowledgement and Consent Form’;

3.4.2 All clergy and diocesan and parish personnel and volunteers who serve in a capacity involving regular contact with children under age eighteen (18) must sign the ‘Acknowledgement and Consent Form’ yearly. All clergy and diocesan and parish personnel and volunteers must submit to a complete federal criminal background check when required by these policies and procedures. In addition, all applicants for employment must complete the Employment Background Check form.

3.4.3 No person is to be permitted to minister, work, or serve in any Church-related ministry in a diocesan or parish institution in a capacity involving regular contact with children under age eighteen (18) without having submitted to a federal criminal background check as mandated by the Chancery. The Diocese also requires this type of background check for positions that do not serve children directly, but which potentially include unmonitored access to children and young people, as well as positions that include work with the elderly and the

disabled. These positions include, but are not limited to, those found on the ‘Suggested List’ posted on the diocesan webpage. Permission for federal background checks for these persons is to be renewed annually by signing the ‘Acknowledgement and Consent Form’, also available on the diocesan webpage.

3.4.4 The Vicar General/Moderator of the Curia may designate additional diocesan or parish personnel or volunteers who are to be required to sign the ‘Acknowledgement and Consent Form’, and to undergo federal criminal background checks.

Seminary Screening and Formation Program

3.5 As part of the psychological testing required in the screening process for all applicants to seminary and the permanent diaconate program an assessment of their fitness for working with children and young people is to be conducted.

3.5.1 The bishops have pledged to evaluate the background of seminary applicants as well as all church personnel who have responsibility for the care and supervision of children and young people (USCCB, *Essential Norms*, Preamble).

3.5.2 The Diocese will require each seminarian or applicant to the permanent diaconate to participate in a training program that addresses issues related to the sexual abuse of minors.

Confidentiality of Information

3.6 The information gained by the Diocese in connection with background checks and screening will be used solely for determining whether the individual is otherwise qualified for the position sought.

3.6.1 The recommended follow-up to all background checks and screening will be communicated confidentially to the appropriate pastor or supervisor of the parish, parish school, or diocesan institution.

3.6.2 This pastor or supervisor will keep the results of the screening in strict confidence and will not disclose the specific contents of the screening to any person other than the applicant and those individuals directly involved in evaluating the individual.