



DIOCESE OF
Jefferson City

BETTER
TOGETHER

SAFE ENVIRONMENT POLICY

*Created by the
Office of Child and Youth Protection*

CREATED SEPTEMBER 2020 | EFFECTIVE NOVEMBER 1, 2020 | UPDATED FEBRUARY 23, 2022

INTRODUCTION

The following policies and procedures of the Safe Environment Program of the Diocese of Jefferson City (“diocese”) govern the practices of employees, volunteers, religious brothers and sisters, priests, and deacons in fulfillment of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ (“USCCB”) “Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People” and its “Essential Norms.” In addition to the schools and parishes of the diocese, these policies also pertain to all Catholic institutions for which the diocesan bishop is a member of the corporation (collectively, “Catholic institutions”). The primary goal of these policies is to provide a safe environment for our children by preventing the opportunity for the abuse of minors.

DEFINITIONS

ABUSE

The diocese is committed to the prevention of abuse of minors. For purposes of this policy, abuse refers to physical and emotional abuse inflicted on a minor, other than by accidental means, as well as all forms of sexual abuse, including child pornography.

ADULT

For the purpose of these policies, “adult” includes anyone 18 years old and is not a student in high school.

MINOR

For the purpose of these policies, any person under 18 years of age is a minor. The term “minor” also applies to any person who is significantly impaired in the ability to, or otherwise unable to, protect his/her own rights and vital interests, or to report abuse or neglect without assistance because of physical or mental impairment.

VOLUNTEER

For the purpose of these policies, the definition of a volunteer is anyone who serves the mission of the Church with no expectation of being paid. For these policies, there are three categories of volunteers:

- a. those whose volunteer duties involve contact with minors;
- b. those whose volunteer duties will not involve contact with minors; and
- c. those whose duties will not involve contact with minors and who volunteer no more than one time per calendar year.

There are different requirements for these three groups of volunteers, outlined in sections 1.2, 1.3 and 1.4. Volunteers who do not work with minors may be members of a council or committee (e.g., parish and finance councils, or stewardship committee), the officers of a parish organization (e.g., Altar Society or men’s group), or certain volunteers for an event (e.g., at a parish picnic or fish fry when there is no involvement with minors during their service in the kitchen). Involvement in parish-related activities is not defined as volunteering (e.g., participating in a quilting group, altar society meetings, or attending Mass or devotions). These forms of participation may be contributing to the mission of the Church, but they are not strictly forms of volunteering.

VENDORS

Vendors are those who provide specific services (e.g., food service, maintenance providers, or after-school care) and who are not directly employed by the diocese.

OVERVIEW

The diocese has developed the Safe Environment Policy to ensure the safety of minors, as required by the USCCB's "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People." This program provides a framework for the diocese to cooperate with parents, civil authorities, educators and community organizations to make and maintain a safe environment for children.

The Safe Environment Program has distinct requirements for parents, volunteers, employees, priests, deacons, religious brother and sisters, seminarians, deacon candidates, and third-party contractors doing business with a Catholic institution.

The Safe Environment Program of the diocese is administered by the Office of Child and Youth Protection of the diocese.

OFFICE OF CHILD AND YOUTH PROTECTION CONTACTS

Mrs. Constance Schepers, Director

573-635-9127, ext. 224, cschepers@diojeffcity.org

Mrs. Jacqueline Baldwin, Victim Assistance Coordinator

573-694-3199, reportabuse@diojeffcity.org

SAFE ENVIRONMENT POLICIES

I. PREVENTION OF ABUSE

1.1. Safe Environment Requirements for Adult Employees, Priests, Deacons, Religious Brothers and Sisters, Seminarians and Deacon Candidates

All adult employees, priests, deacons, religious brothers and sisters, seminarians and deacon candidates must accomplish the following prior to engaging in any Church related activities or employment for the diocese:

- ▶ complete a Protecting God's Children (VIRTUS) workshop in-person or online and agree to ongoing online training;
- ▶ agree to complete a national background screening that evaluates any history related to criminal charges, and agree to automatic rescreening every three months;
- ▶ complete the state Family Care Safety Registry background check form; and
- ▶ read and consent to the Code of Pastoral Conduct by providing an electronic signature.

1.1.1. Sexual Abuse Prevention Training for Adults: Protecting God's Children

This program provides education regarding how to detect possible abuse, both in circumstances and events, which might indicate grooming behavior as well as signs of abuse displayed by minors themselves. All employees, priests, deacons, religious brothers and sisters, seminarians and deacon candidates must keep current on their continuing training video modules and other additional renewals as requested.

Alternative safe environment educational materials are available for those who are victims of sexual abuse. For inquiries, please contact the director of the Office of Child and Youth Protection.

1.1.2. Background Screenings

The diocese uses [fastraxselect.com](https://www.fastraxselect.com) to screen employees, priests, deacons, religious brothers and sisters, seminarians and deacon candidates. Screenings to review criminal history and an update are performed every three months or more frequently if appropriate.

1.1.3. Code of Pastoral Conduct

Employees, priests, deacons, religious brothers and sisters, seminarians and deacon candidates must always comply with the Code of Pastoral Conduct. Prior to engaging in any Church-related activities or employment for the diocese, they must review and sign the Code.

1.1.4. Continuing Education Requirement for Adult Employees, Priests, Deacons, Religious Brothers and Sisters, Seminarians and Deacon Candidates

All adult employees, priests, deacons, religious brothers and sisters, seminarians and deacon candidates are required to complete ongoing education related to child protection issues. They must view a training module once every three years through the online VIRTUS system. Personal VIRTUS accounts are monitored by the director of the Office of Child and Youth Protection. Regular reports of unmet requirements are provided to the diocesan bishop for his review.

Priests, deacons, religious brothers and sisters, seminarians and deacon candidates may, at times, be excused from certain continuing education requirements due to illness, age or other compelling reasons. Exceptions for clergy may be granted by the vicar for priests or vicar for deacons in partnership with the director of the Office of Child and Youth Protection.

Priests and deacons who fail to comply with the continuing education requirements may, after a warning, have their faculties revoked or another just penalty at the discretion of the diocesan bishop.

Lay employees, religious brothers and sisters, seminarians and deacon candidates who fail to comply with the continuing education may be subject to disciplinary consequences.

1.1.5. Safe Environment Requirements for Extern Clergy and Religious

In addition to safe environment compliance, extern clergy and religious are required to provide a letter from their superior upon their arrival to the diocese stating there is nothing in their past preventing them from working with minors. Those clerics or religious who provide ministry or who reside in the diocese are to be cleared through the vicars for priests and deacons or the bishop's delegate for religious in partnership with the director of the Office of Child and Youth Protection.

Notwithstanding those excused according to section 1.1.4, the continuing education required by this policy is necessary for all active and retired clergy who exercise ministry in the diocese. All religious brothers and sisters who are providing any ministry in a Catholic institution must also comply with these continuing education requirements. Exceptions for non-clergy religious brothers and sisters within the diocese may be granted by the bishop's delegate for religious, in consultation with the director of the Office of Child and Youth Protection.

Religious brothers and sisters who fail to comply with the continuing education requirements may, after a warning, be asked to cease ministry and their religious superior will be notified.

1.2. Safe Environment Requirements for Volunteers Whose Duties Involve Contact with Minors

All volunteers whose duties involve contact with minors must accomplish the following prior to volunteering:

- ▶ complete a Protecting God's Children (VIRTUS) workshop in-person or online;
- ▶ agree to a national background screening that evaluates any history related to criminal charges, and agree to automatic rescreening every three months; and
- ▶ read and consent to the Code of Pastoral Conduct.

1.2.1. All K-8 Catholic school parents/guardians are required to complete the requirements in 1.2. Parents/guardians who fail to complete these requirements will not be allowed to enroll their children in Catholic schools. In some instances, the Catholic Schools Office in collaboration with the Office of Child and Youth Protection may grant exemptions to this rule.

1.3. Safe Environment Requirements for Volunteers Whose Duties Do Not Involve Contact with Minors

All volunteers whose duties do not involve contact with minors must accomplish the following prior to volunteering in any Church-related activities:

- ▶ complete a Protecting God's Children (VIRTUS) workshop in-person or online;
- ▶ agree to a national background screening through the National Sex Offender Registry completed by chancery personnel);and
- ▶ read and consent to the Code of Pastoral Conduct.

1.3.1. This category of volunteer must always be accompanied by someone who has completed all requirements for volunteers who work with minors (group 1.2).

1.4. Safe Environment Requirements for Volunteers Whose Duties Do Not Involve Contact with Minors and Who Volunteer No More Than One Time Per Calendar Year

All volunteers whose duties do not involve contact with minors and who volunteer no more than one time per calendar year must accomplish the following prior to volunteering in any Church-related activities:

- ▶ agree to a national background screening through the National Sex Offender Registry, completed by chancery personnel);
- ▶ read and consent to the Code of Pastoral Conduct; and
- ▶ complete the Single Occasion Volunteer Form that is available at diojeffcity.org/safe_environment.

1.4.1. This category of volunteer must always be accompanied by someone who has completed all requirements for volunteers who work with minors (group 1.2)

1.5. Safe Environment Requirements for Employees of Vendors Who Have Contact with Minors

It is important that contracted employees of vendors are screened for any criminal history. The responsibility for such screening rests with the vendor, not with the administrator of the Catholic institution. The administrator is responsible for ensuring the vendor completes the screening at the appropriate time. Administrators must require evidence that the background screening has been completed. Vendors must provide a letter stating the date the vendor's employee was screened and a statement that the individual has nothing in his or her history to prevent them from working with or near minors. Vendors may also supply a copy of their employee's screening form from the State of Missouri. If a vendor does not cooperate in this screening effort, another vendor shall be sought. The director of the Office of Child and Youth Protection will assist the vendor in setting up an account with potential screening providers if necessary.

Employees of vendors who have contact with minors shall have ongoing evaluations conducted by their employers.

II. SAFE ENVIRONMENT COMPLIANCE FOR YOUTH

2.1. Sexual Abuse Prevention Training for Children and Youth –Teaching Touching Safety

Students in diocesan day schools and parish schools of religion (grades K-12) receive an age-appropriate curriculum annually. The Teaching Touching Safety program has been approved by the diocese. The curriculum aims to teach children about healthy and appropriate boundaries, how to identify safe adults in whom they can confide, and gives applicable steps children can take if they find themselves in an uncomfortable situation. Any concerns or objections about such material by parents or guardians should be addressed at the school and/or parish level, as appropriate.

Children may be excused from the curriculum at the request of their parent or guardian. If the parent or guardian does request their child be excused, they will be provided with the curriculum to teach at home. If a parent or guardian declines and chooses not to provide the curriculum at home, they will be asked to complete and sign the “opt out” form provided by the school or parish school of religion. The Teaching Touching Safety program for children and youth will be coordinated and taught by a teacher designated by the principal or pastor.

Note: While the Teaching Touching Safety program offers eight lessons, the diocese believes the training objectives can be accomplished in one session per year. The focus should be on the training objectives; the lesson plans are suggestions only.

2.2. Safe Environment Requirements for Student Employees and Volunteers

For the purposes of this policy, students include anyone under 18 years old or who is 18 years or older and is a student in high school.

2.2.1. Code of Ethical Conduct for Minors Volunteering or Working with Younger Children

Young people under the age of 18 (or age 18 or older and in high school) who volunteer or work with or near minors as part of a high school service project or any other parish program or activity must sign the Code of Ethical Conduct for Minors Volunteering or Working with Younger Children. Parents or guardians must also sign this form and attest that the young person has nothing in his or her history that would render them not suitable to work with or near minors.

2.2.2. Minimum Age for Lead Chaperones for Events Involving Minors

For purposes of compliance, someone who is 18 years old is considered an adult. However, for events involving minors there must be at least one lead chaperone who is 21 years old or older and possesses appropriate leadership ability as determined by the institution sponsoring the youth event.

III. SAFE ENVIRONMENT COMPLIANCE FOR OTHERS

3.1. Safe Environment Requirements for Visiting Clergy, Lay Ministers and Speakers

Individuals who provide temporary ministry in the diocese must provide written documentation from their home diocese confirming they have met all applicable safe environment compliance requirements.

Clergy must provide a letter attesting to suitability for ministry, issued by their ordinary (or his delegate) or major superior (see Article 13, “Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People”). The letter, which must be received prior to the visit, should contain the location of their ministry and the date(s) of the visit.

Lay ministers and speakers shall provide a letter outlining their suitability written by either their pastor, chancery official, or local safe environment director on letterhead and shall include the signature of the appropriate authority. The letter, which must be received prior to the visit, shall contain the location of their ministry and the date(s) of the visit. If they are not associated with a parish, the diocese or other Church organization, references must be checked before the visit.

IV. MONITORING SAFE ENVIRONMENT COMPLIANCE

4.1. Parish Audits and Diocesan Audit

The Office of Child and Youth Protection and independent auditors hired by the USCCB will audit parishes and the diocese respectively on a regular basis to ensure all requirements of the “Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People” have been met.

V. COMMUNICATION OF REPORTING INFORMATION

All Catholic institutions in the diocese must make safe environment compliance requirements and the following information readily available to employees, volunteers and all other individuals.

MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT HOTLINE NUMBER

- ▶ 1-800-392-3738 (for Missouri residents)
- ▶ 1-573-751-3448 (for those outside Missouri)

To report past or current allegations of sexual abuse by a member of the clergy or by lay employees or volunteers of the diocese, contact:

Mrs. Jacqueline Baldwin, Victim Assistance Coordinator
573-694-3199, reportabuse@diojeffcity.org

The following flow chart explains the process for handling allegations of sexual abuse of a minor.

DIOCESE OF JEFFERSON CITY PROCESS FOR HANDLING ALLEGATIONS OF SEXUAL ABUSE OF A MINOR

(BY CLERGY)

