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The Three Elements of the Safe Environment Program

These are the three elements of the Safe Environment Program:

1. Criminal Background Check
2. Abuse Prevention Policies
3. Safe Environment Training

All Church Personnel must fulfill all three of these requirements.

Definition of Church Personnel

As defined in the *Policy for the Prevention of & Response to Sexual Abuse, Sexual Misconduct & Sexual Harassment*, Church Personnel include the following:

- Priests & Deacons (clerics)
- Seminarians, Deacon Candidates, and Deacon Aspirants
- Religious (men and women)
- Lay Faithful
 - All paid employees of the parishes, schools or agencies of the Archdiocese
 - All volunteers who have contact with minors or vulnerable adults in their volunteer capacity

Safe Environment Coordinator

Each parish, school, or agency of the Archdiocese of Seattle should have at least one person designated to coordinate the Safe Environment efforts at their location.

The local Safe Environment Coordinator will:

- Serve as the local contact person for the Safe Environment Program (SEP)
- Ensure all Church Personnel are fully compliant with the current Safe Environment requirements
- Ensure that the verification forms are submitted to the SEP office.
 - For Schools: Teaching Safety class records on or before October 31st and April 30th of each compliance year.
 - For Parishes: Teaching Safety class records on or before April 15th of each compliance year.
 - Both: End of Fiscal Year Compliance Verification form on or before May 31st of each compliance year.
- Coordinate local Safe Environment classes through:
 - Scheduling
 - Publicize in parish bulletins, etc.
 - Class logistics (print sign-in sheets & handouts; set-up/clean-up; send appropriate paperwork to SEP Office)
- Manage all Safe Environment record keeping, including:
 - Background Checks
 - Abuse Prevention Policies
 - Safe Environment Training
- Oversee local administration of Virtus Database

As the local coordinator, you are ultimately responsible for the Safe Environment Program at your site. However, you may delegate responsibilities as you see fit. See "Implementing Safe Environment in Your Parish or School" for ideas about organizing the program at your location.

Implementing Safe Environment in Your Parish or School

As the local coordinator, you have the option to structure the Safe Environment Program at your parish, school, or agency in a number of different ways to best suit its ministry.

Below are a few examples of different ways to organize Safe Environment at your parish, school, or agency:

- The local Safe Environment Coordinator address all aspects of Safe Environment for all programs
- The local Safe Environment Coordinator designates one person to coordinate each aspect of Safe Environment: background checks, abuse prevention policies, and training
- The local Safe Environment Coordinator designates the head of each program to manage Safe Environment requirements for participate in their programs

We encourage you to organize the program as it is convenient for your location. However, remember you are ultimately responsible for the compliance of your location.

Getting Started: Setting-Up Safe Environment

If you are a **new** local coordinator, here are a few steps to getting started:

- Notify the Safe Environment Office (sep@seattlearch.org) that you are now the coordinator for your location. (This will need to be verified by the Pastor, Priest Administrator, Pastoral Coordinator, or Principal via email, sep@seattlearch.org .)
- Navigate the Safe Environment Website located on the Archdiocese of Seattle web page and be sure to visit the Coordinators Toolkit to help you understand what your responsibilities will be. Pay special attention to the section, "Overview of the Safe Environment Program"
- Talk with the staff at your location to learn the local procedures and protocols already in place
- Familiarize yourself with the Virtus Database
 - A Coordinator's User Guide can be found on the Archdiocesan website under the Safe Environment tab labeled as Coordinator's toolkit
- Begin to evaluate the status of the employees and volunteers at your location:
 - Do all Church Personnel have a current criminal background check?
 - Have all Church Personnel signed off on the abuse prevention policies?
 - Are all Church Personnel up-to-date with their required Safe Environment training?

Record Keeping for Safe Environment Program

The Virtus Database is the central database for the Safe Environment Program in the Archdiocese of Seattle. This database contains the official training records, background check information, and can track policies for all Church Personnel.

However, there are also some records pertaining to the Safe Environment Program that must be kept on-site:

1. **BACKGROUND CHECKS** – All background check records for both employees and volunteers must be kept in perpetuity. For each background check submitted, the location must maintain physical copies of results information.
2. **ABUSE PREVENTION POLICIES** –Participants logging onto Virtus will sign a *Church Personnel Agreement Form* online. See Pg. 10 in regards to documentation retention.
3. **SAFE ENVIRONMENT TRAINING VERIFICATION** – A copy of the Certificate of Completion, or other Proof of Verification, must be kept in the personnel/volunteer file. All training verification must be kept in perpetuity. This certificate of completion must correspond with the training records in Virtus Database to be valid.

Volunteer files may be organized as it is convenient for the location.

Here are some examples on how different locations organize their volunteer files:

- Each volunteer has their own file, similar to an employee personnel file
- There is a set of files, organized alphabetically by last name, that hold all pertinent volunteer information
- There are notebooks with all volunteer information stored alphabetically by the volunteers' last name
- There is a Background Check Notebook with all volunteers' background check paperwork filed alphabetically with additional notebooks for Policies and Training

The Power to Protect – Teaching Safety to Minors

In addition to the employee/volunteer records detailed above, schools and parishes are also responsible for record keeping in regards to the Safe Environment training for the students of Catholic Schools and minors involved in parish religious education programs.

Catholic Schools: The curriculum, "*Teaching Safety*," can be accessed from the Virtus database. Grades Kindergarten through 12 will be taught two age appropriate lessons each year. Research shows that young children and adults will retain information that is taught frequently and expansively throughout their years of education.

Catholic Parishes: The curriculum, "*Teaching Safety*," as well as parent and educator resources, can be accessed through the Archdiocese of Seattle website by visiting the Safe Environment page and clicking on Faith Formation/Youth Ministry Toolkit. Grades Kindergarten through 12 will be taught one age appropriate lesson each year. These lessons have been integrated with the Faith Formation norms and standards.

1. CLASS ATTENDANCE RECORDS – While final attendance numbers are reported to the Safe Environment Program in October and April of every school year (see "Safe Environment Training – Children/Youth"), the complete attendance records should be kept on file at the school. You will submit the attendance numbers and the date the class was held either by using the provided "Recording Forms" or in Virtus as well as fill out the end of the year verification form which verifies your submitted student numbers. For instructions you may call the SEP office (206-274-3188).
2. OPT-OUT FORMS – If a parent chooses to decline the Safe Environment abuse prevention training for their child, a signed Opt-Out form must be kept on file at the school. You must also submit the Opt-Out forms to the SEP office when verification forms are due. Opt-Out forms are located in the Virtus Database and can be accessed by your school's principal or any person within the Virtus database that has educator privileges. Opt-Out forms can also be found under the "forms/articles" tab of the Coordinator Toolkit web page.

Screening & Selection of Volunteers

Application Forms

It is recommended that volunteers that have contact with minors or vulnerable adults in their volunteer capacity complete and sign a Volunteer Application.

A Volunteer Application is available on the Coordinators Toolkit webpage under other resources: <https://archseattle.org/for-parishes/safe-environment/safe-environment-coordinators-toolkit/>

Interview & References

Parishes, schools, and agencies of the Archdiocese of Seattle are encouraged to complete an interview and check references for volunteers wishing to serve in a capacity that includes contact with minors or vulnerable adults.

Annual Verification of Safe Environment Compliance

In order to ensure that each parish and school of the Archdiocese of Seattle fulfills their obligations with regard to Safe Environment, compliance will be verified in several ways:

1. Verification Forms - Each parish and school must annually submit a Safe Environment Verification Form signed by the pastor, assigned pastoral leader or principal. This form is due by May 31st of each year.
2. Compliance Reviews – Compliance Reviews will be conducted by the Assistant Director of Human Resources at each parish or school at least once every three years.
3. Safe Environment Attendance Numbers for Children & Youth – Schools and parishes must also submit the final attendance numbers regarding students who were required to participate in Safe Environment training during that academic year. Numbers will be submitted via the provided “Recording Forms” as well as verified on the annual verifications form, see above.
 - a. School numbers are due on October 31st and April 30th of every compliance year.
 - b. Parish numbers are due on April 15th of every compliance year.

Safe Environment Checklist For Adults at Parishes and Schools

BACKGROUND CHECKS

❑ All Church Personnel have successfully completed a criminal background check, before or on their first day of service, conducted by the Archdiocese of Seattle every three years. Documentation is kept in personnel/volunteer file.

SEXUAL ABUSE PREVENTION POLICIES

❑ All Church Personnel have a signed *Safe Environment Program Church Personnel Agreement* form in their personnel/volunteer file within three days of beginning service.

- Prior to July 1, 2015- All *Safe Environment Program Church Personnel Agreement* forms are required to be kept in personnel/volunteer file in perpetuity.
- Any *Safe Environment Program Church Personnel Agreement* form signed after July 1, 2015 are kept virtually on the VIRTUS platform.

SAFE ENVIRONMENT TRAINING

❑ All new Church Personnel have completed the *Protecting God's Children* course within **30** days of beginning service.

- Prior to July 1, 2015- All certificates of completion or attendance verification are required to be kept in personnel/volunteer file in perpetuity.
- Any certificates of completion or attendance verification after July 1, 2015 are kept virtually on the VIRTUS platform.

❑ All Church Personnel must complete update training at their required time (every three years).

- Prior to July 1, 2015- All certificates of completion are required to be kept in personnel/volunteer file in perpetuity.
- Any certificates of completion after July 1, 2015 are kept virtually on the VIRTUS platform.

SAFE ENVIRONMENT VERIFICATION

❑ Signed Safe Environment Verification Form is returned to SEP Office by May 31st of each year.

- This form must be signed by the pastor, principal, or appointed pastoral leader.
- The original form is mailed to the SEP Office; you may keep a copy for your records.

Safe Environment Checklist For Minors at Parishes and Schools

For Parishes

- Pre-K through Grade 12
 - "Teaching Safety" completed (One lesson per grade level).
- Opt-Outs
 - A signed Opt-Out form is on file at the parish for any minor who did not participate in Safe Environment training.
- Training Verification
 - Student attendance submitted to the Safe Environment Office.

For Schools

- Pre-K through Grade 12
 - "Teaching Safety" completed (Two lessons per grade level).
- Opt-Outs
 - A signed Opt-Out form is on file at the school for any student who did not participate in Safe Environment training.
- Training Verification
 - Student attendance submitted to the Safe Environment Office.

Independent Organizations

Independent Collaborators in Ministry are organizations that minister within the Archdiocese of Seattle but are independent and are not part of the Corporation of the Catholic Archbishop of Seattle.

Organizationally, these groups are **not** under the jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Seattle, pastors, or archdiocesan staff. As operational control, decision-making authority, and fiscal oversight are outside of the parish, these groups are not required to follow the requirements of the Safe Environment Program as defined in the *Policy for the Prevention of & Response to Sexual Misconduct, Sexual Abuse and Sexual Harassment*.

However, the Archbishop, as leader of the Archdiocese, is responsible for assuring that activities taking place in parishes and schools are in accord with Canon Law. Therefore, Independent Collaborators in Ministry must ensure that their employees and applicable volunteers have fulfilled the Safe Environment requirements as outlined in the *Charter for the Protection for Children & Young People (USCCB, 2005)*.

An example of some of the Independent Collaborators in Ministry within the Archdiocese of Seattle: Knights of Columbus and independent Catholic schools.

Independent Collaborators in Ministry follow their own policies regarding the Safe Environment requirements of background checks, policies and training.

- They are responsible for all their own training, background checks, and all costs associated with fulfilling Safe Environment requirements
- They are responsible for their own record keeping
- They simply need to be able to verify with the Archdiocese of Seattle that all requirements have been met

Some Independent Collaborators in Ministry are independent but include non-independent chapters.

Below are the criteria that make chapters of the independent organizations official programs of a parish or school.

- If operational control, decision making authority, and fiscal oversight lie with the parish/school, then the chapter is a Parish/School Group.
- If a Boy Scout troop/pack is parish-chartered (a pastor or assigned parish leader has signed the Boy Scout Charter), it is considered an official Parish Group. If a person/organization other than pastor or assigned parish leader has signed the Boy Scout Charter, the troop/pack is considered independent.

Any chapters that are considered official Parish or School Groups must adhere to the Safe Environment policies of the Archdiocese of Seattle.

The chapters that are NOT official Parish or School Groups remain part of the larger independent organization. As such, they follow the policies of the independent organization, as described above.

Any Outside Organization that simply uses a parish or school facility will verify their compliance with Safe Environment in the Facility Use Agreement. They are responsible for all costs associated with fulfilling Safe Environment requirements and will manage their own record keeping.

See the *Parish Property Use Guidelines and Facility Use Agreement* under the Property & Construction tab on the Archdiocese of Seattle website.

Guidelines: <https://archseattle.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Forms-and-Contracts-Guidelines-Use-Parish-Property.pdf>

Property and Construction Forms and Contracts Page: <https://archseattle.org/for-parishes/property-construction/forms-contracts/>

CYO Athletics

The CYO Athletic Program includes over 1000 teams in soccer, track, volleyball, baseball, basketball and cross-country. Thousands of volunteers serve as Parish Athletic Directors (ADs), Coaches, and Assistant Coaches to keep the program running.

Most CYO Athletics programs fall under the leadership of the local parish. It is the parish's responsibility to ensure that all appropriate volunteers satisfy the requirements of the Safe Environment Program.

You should work with the parish's Athletic Director to ensure all coaches on the team rosters are compliant with Safe Environment.

All Coaches, whether serving as Head Coach or Assistant Coach, must fulfill all Safe Environment obligations.

Any parent who wishes to assist the Head Coach must be listed as an Assistant Coach on the team roster. As Assistant Coaches, they must fulfill the Safe Environment requirements.

When a CYO Athletics volunteer registers for the *Protecting God's Children* course, they must identify the parish and/or school that they will be serving at. In addition, they will need to have two roles list in their profile, see example below.

- Volunteer
- CYO Coach

Annual Follow-up Training

All CYO Athletics program volunteers must also complete a renewal training required every three years.

Level 2 Catholic Schools

All Level 2 Catholic School employees & volunteers who participate in CYO Athletics, must fulfill the Safe Environment requirements through the school as defined in their organization's policies.

Level 2 Catholic Schools are responsible for all administration, record keeping, and costs associated with fulfilling the Safe Environment requirements outlined in the *Charter for the Protection of Children & Young People*.

Non-Catholic Organizations

All non-Catholic Organizations must sign-off on the Participant Agreement which includes verification of Safe Environment compliance.

Church Personnel Under 18

Employees and volunteers under the age of 18 are not permitted to have unsupervised contact with minors or vulnerable adults.

Any situation where an employee or volunteer under the age of 18 is in contact with minors or vulnerable adults, they must be supervised at all times by an individual, 21 years or older, who has completed all requirements of the Safe Environment Program.

Safe Environment Requirements

Since Church Personnel under the age of 18 do not have unsupervised contact to minors or vulnerable adults, the Safe Environment requirements are a little different than with adults.

Employees under the Age of 18 must:

- Complete a Pre-employment Criminal Background Check for Minors. Located on the Archdiocese of Seattle website under Safe Environment in the Background Check tab.
- Sign off on the Safe Environment Program abuse prevention policies. Located on the Archdiocese of Seattle website under Safe Environment in the Policies tab.

Volunteers under the age of 18 must:

- Complete a Pre-employment Criminal Background Check for Minors. Located on the Archdiocese of Seattle website under Safe Environment in the Background Check tab.
- Sign off on the Safe Environment Program abuse prevention policies. Located on the Archdiocese of Seattle website under Safe Environment in the Policies tab.

Safe Environment Training

The content of the *Protecting God's Children* course is not appropriate for participants under the age of 18.

However, any employee or volunteer under the age of 18, who may have contact with minors or vulnerable adults, should at least understand how to report suspected abuse in the parish or school at which they serve. This may be done privately in a meeting with the individual.

Independent Contractors

Independent Contractors are defined as people who are engaged by the Archdiocese of Seattle because their professional expertise is needed, either temporarily or on an ongoing basis for a particular project. This may include, but is not limited to, musicians, information technology/computer support, accountants/bookkeepers, and maintenance/landscaping support.

Safe Environment Requirements

In order to determine Safe Environment requirements, Independent Contractors should be evaluated based on their job responsibilities or role within the parish, school, or agency.

If the Independent Contractor meets the criteria for needing Safe Environment, then all Safe Environment requirements must be met, including:

- Complete Criminal Background Check
- Sign-off on Abuse Prevention Policies
- Complete Safe Environment Training

If the Independent Contractor does not meet the criteria, then they do not need to fulfill Safe Environment requirements. They should not perform any of the described duties including: contact with minors or vulnerable adults; driving; or access to cash, checks, or other negotiables.

Sex Offender Guidelines: Directions for Parish Implementation

A Sex Offender may become known to the parish leadership in three primary ways:

1. A sex offender may come forward and disclose his/her criminal background.
2. A sex offender may apply to volunteer in the parish. In the course of processing the background check, their criminal history is revealed.
3. A member of your parish/school community may be aware of the sex offender's status and come forward with information.

Once a sex offender is made known to parish leadership, the Sex Offender Guidelines must be implemented:

Find the Sex Offender forms under the forms tab on the Coordinators Toolkit page. We advise you to contact the Safe Environment Office at 206-382-4285 so that you can be instructed to correctly implement these guidelines.

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month

Parishes, schools and agencies of the Archdiocese of Seattle are encouraged to use this opportunity to highlight the importance of Child Abuse Prevention.

Each year, the Safe Environment Program distributes materials to assist these efforts.

Prior April Child Abuse Prevention Month Packets have included:

- Bulletin Announcements to correlate with the weekly readings
- Prayers of Intercessions for Sunday liturgies
- Activities for children/youth
- Articles and important information

Materials will be sent out at the beginning of March. If you have special requests or ideas on how we can honor April Child Abuse Prevention Month, contact the Safe Environment Program.