

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Our Mission with the Safe Environment Program The Three Elements of the Safe Environment Program Definition of Church Personnel	2
Safe Environment Coordinator Responsibilities	3
Implementing Safe Environment in Your Parish or School	4
Getting Started: Setting Up Safe Environment	5
Record Keeping for Safe Environment Program	6-7
Safe Environment Checklist for Adults	8
Safe Environment Checklist for Children’s Teaching Safety	9
Safe Environment Checklist for Minors Working with Younger Children	10
Independent Organizations	11-12
CYO Athletics	13
Church Personnel Under 18: Minors Working with Younger Children	14
Independent Contractors	15
Virtus Profiles Background Check Submissions Flagged Background Check Procedure	16
Background Checks Returned with Criminal History	17
Important Things to Know about the BGC Submission Process	18
Sex Offender Guidelines: Directions for Parish Implementation	19
April is Child Abuse Prevention Month	20

Our Mission with the Safe Environment Program

The Archdiocese of Seattle has been identified as a national leader in our efforts towards child abuse prevention. Our Safe Environment Program is a response to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*. The Archdiocese is actively committed to ensuring that all of our volunteers, staff and clergy work together to provide safe parishes and schools for all children as well as vulnerable adults.

The Three Elements of the Safe Environment Program

These are the three elements of the Safe Environment Program:

1. **Criminal Background Check** – before or on the first day of service and renewed every three years.
2. **Abuse Prevention Policies** – read and signed before or on the first day of service.
3. **Safe Environment Training** – initial in-person or internet-based training session within 30 days of starting service; online renewal training every three years.

All Church Personnel, as defined below, 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 in parish or school sponsored ministries and activities.

Safe Environment Coordinator Responsibilities

Each parish, school, or agency of the Archdiocese of Seattle must have a 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 that all Church Personnel are fully compliant with the current Safe Environment requirements
- Ensure that all required tracking forms are submitted to the SEP office.
 - **Schools:** Educator Confirmation Form and teaching safety Recording Form – these must be filled out completely and emailed to the SEP office no later than the deadline determined by SEP.
 - **Parishes:** Catechist Confirmation Form and teaching safety Recording Form – these must be filled out completely and emailed to the SEP office no later than the deadline determined by SEP.
 - **Parishes and Schools:** Annual Compliance Verification Form on or before May 31st each year.
- In cooperation with the facilitator, coordinate *Protecting God's Children for Adults* in-person sessions:
 - Schedule sessions and submit facility requests
 - Publicize through parish bulletins, school newsletters, websites, etc.
 - Assist with class logistics – set-up/clean-up, registrations, emailing roster to SEP office, etc.
- Manage all Safe Environment record keeping, including:
 - Background Checks
 - Abuse Prevention Policies
 - Safe Environment Training
- Oversee local administration of Virtus and Trak-1 Databases

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"* on page 4 for ideas about organizing the program at your location.

Implementing Safe Environment in Your Location

As the local coordinator, you have the option to structure and manage the Safe Environment Program in a number of different ways to best suit the needs of your location.

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

- The local Safe Environment Coordinator address all aspects of Safe Environment for all location 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 participants in their programs

You are encouraged to organize the program as it is convenient for your location. However, remember that you are ultimately responsible for managing the compliance of your location and will report to your pastor, principal or department lead annually prior to them signing the annual Compliance Verification Form.

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 that you are now the coordinator for your location. You must be endorsed by your administrator or principal. Please ask them to email the Safe Environment office with that endorsement: sep@seattlearch.org.
- Arrange for new coordinator training with the Safe Environment office. This is highly recommended as the training will give you the information and confidence you need to be a success in your new role.
- Navigate the Safe Environment website located on the Archdiocese of Seattle web page and become familiar with the resources there.
- Talk with the staff at your location to learn the local procedures and protocols already in place
- Familiarize yourself with the Virtus and Trak-1 databases (*administrative access within Virtus and Trak-1 account access must be updated when there is a new local coordinator*)
- Use the Master Report and Background Check Report to assess the status of your location compliance. This is an on-going process, suggested monthly at a minimum.
 - 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

Adult Church Personnel

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 results, and policy sign-off documentation for all Church Personnel. Virtus Database has been in use since July 2015 and is our permanent database for all historical Safe Environment records.

PeopleFacts/Trak-1 is our criminal background search vendor and all background check reports are stored permanently in this database. Copies of actual reports may be obtained and printed as needed by authorized staff through your location account in Trak-1.

To determine the retention schedule for Safe Environment paper records please refer to the Records Policies and Resources for Parishes and Archdiocesan Schools by visiting <https://archseattle.org/for-parishes/parish-archives-and-records-management/>. For additional information pertaining to your location you may contact Archives and Records Management at the Archdiocese of Seattle 206.382.4352 or archives@seattlearch.org.

Children's Training

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 faith formation programs. Teaching safety programs are required for all children grades K-10, and is optional for grades 11 & 12.

The following records must be provided by each location to the Safe Environment office each year as part of our USCCB Safe Environment Audit documentation:

- I. Staff Verification
 - a. **Educator Confirmation Form** (*All Catholic schools*)
 - b. **Catechist Confirmation Form** (*All Parish faith formation programs*)
- II. **Recording Form** – one form compiling all grade levels per location. Each grade level must include the following information:
 - Date of lesson/name of person teaching lesson
 - Number of children enrolled in grade level
 - Number of children trained
 - Number of children absent
 - Number of children opted-out
- III. **Opt-Out requests** – written request from parent specifying child(ren) who were not allowed to attend the *Circle of Grace* teaching safety lessons.

Minors Working with Younger Children

Minors under the age of 18 are not able to create a profile in the Virtus database. Safe Environment records for all minors must be retained permanently in paper form. A binder or other suitable filing system stored where you keep confidential records would be appropriate. See "Church Personnel Under Age 18" on page 13 for a full description of the procedure and requirements.

Annual Compliance Verification Form

Each location is responsible for ensuring ongoing compliance with Safe Environment policy and requirements for all Church Personnel in their location.

The annual **Compliance Verification Form** process is as follows:

- I. Form emailed by Safe Environment office to all locations on or before April 1st each year.
- II. Locations review current compliance status of all active Church Personnel and work to bring those who are non-compliant into compliance.
- III. Once all active Church Personnel are fully compliant prepare the form with the data requested.
- IV. Form must be signed by pastor, priest administrator, pastoral coordinator, school principal or chancery department lead.
- V. Forms must be emailed to the Safe Environment office no later than May 31st each year.

It is highly encouraged that location SE coordinators conduct ongoing compliance management throughout the year, since volunteers and employees are continually coming due to renew their SE requirements, and new volunteers and employees are being added to locations periodically.

The Master Report created through the Virtus Database is a helpful tool for monitoring compliance. This report should be created and reviewed regularly, every month or so depending on the size and volume of Church Personnel at your location. This report is for your use and does not need to be provided to the Safe Environment office.

Please email all required forms on or prior to the deadline date to sep@seattlearch.org

PLEASE DO NOT MAIL ANY DOCUMENTATION TO THE CHANCERY

Safe Environment Checklist For Adults

BACKGROUND CHECKS

☐ All Church Personnel have successfully completed a criminal background check, before or on their first day of service and maintain a clear criminal background check every three years while in active service. Background checks must be conducted through the Virtus/Trak-1 databases for the Archdiocese of Seattle.

SEXUAL ABUSE PREVENTION POLICIES

- ☐ All Church Personnel have read and signed *Church Personnel Policies* before or on their first day of 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.
 - After July 1, 2015 – All *Safe Environment Program Church Personnel Policy Documents* are retained permanently in the Virtus database. **

SAFE ENVIRONMENT TRAINING

☐ All new Church Personnel have completed the *Protecting God's Children for Adults* in-person session **OR** Online Awareness 4.0 session 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.
 - After July 1, 2015 – All training documentation and certificates of completion are retained permanently in the Virtus database. **
- ☐ All Church Personnel have completed 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.
 - After July 1, 2015 – All training documentation and certificates of completion are retained permanently in the Virtus database. **

** To determine the retention schedule for Safe Environment paper records please refer to the Records Policies and Resources for Parishes and Archdiocesan Schools by visiting <https://archseattle.org/for-parishes/parish-archives-and-records-management/>. For additional information pertaining to your location you may contact Archives and Records Management at the Archdiocese of Seattle 206.382.4352 or archives@seattlearch.org.

Safe Environment Checklist For Children's Teaching Safety

- K through Grade 10 (grades 11 & 12 optional)
 - *Circle of Grace* teaching safety lessons completed for all required grade levels in all parish Faith Formation programs and all Catholic schools.

- Educator or Catechist Confirmation Form
 - List of names conducting lessons for each grade level (educators at schools; catechists at parishes)

- Recording Form
 - Compiled form for all grade levels documenting student attendance

- Opt-Outs
 - There is no formal form for opt-outs. Parents must request opt-out for individual child(ren) in writing

** To determine the retention schedule for Safe Environment paper records please refer to the Records Policies and Resources for Parishes and Archdiocesan Schools by visiting <https://archseattle.org/for-parishes/parish-archives-and-records-management/>. For additional information pertaining to your location you may contact Archives and Records Management at the Archdiocese of Seattle 206.382.4352 or archives@seattlearch.org.

Please email all required forms on or prior to the deadline date to sep@seattlearch.org

PLEASE DO NOT MAIL ANY DOCUMENTATION TO THE CHANCERY

Safe Environment Checklist For Minors Working with Younger Children

- ❑ Code of Professional Conduct Form
 - Form has been reviewed with youth by parent/guardian, signed/dated and returned to local SE coordinator for filing

- ❑ Background Check Authorization Form for youth age 16-17 (prior to 18th birthday)
 - Authorization Form is completed and signed by parent/guardian and has been submitted to Trak-1 for criminal background search.

- ❑ Adult supervision arranged for all minors and for young adults age 18-21
 - Young adults age 18-21 must have an SEP-certified adult over the age of 21 on-site at all times

****** To determine the retention schedule for Safe Environment paper records please refer to the Records Policies and Resources for Parishes and Archdiocesan Schools by visiting <https://archseattle.org/for-parishes/parish-archives-and-records-management/>. For additional information pertaining to your location you may contact Archives and Records Management at the Archdiocese of Seattle 206.382.4352 or archives@seattlearch.org.

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, updated 2018)*.

An example of some of the Independent Collaborators in Ministry within the Archdiocese of Seattle: Knights of Columbus, St. Vincent de Paul Society, American Girls, Boy Scouts of America (without a parish charter), and Level II Catholic schools.

Independent Collaborators in Ministry follow their own safeguarding policies and requirements for 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 Safe Environment compliance of these members is managed by the parish or school through the Virtus Database.

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. Members are not managed through our Archdiocese of Seattle Virtus Database.

Any Outside Organization that uses a parish or school facility must verify their compliance with Safe Environment as part of the Facility Use Agreement, ideally providing this information annually when a Facility Use Agreement is renewed. Appropriate documentation would include a letter outlining their safeguarding policy and requirements and a statement ensuring that all of their members are compliant and current with those requirements. The Outside Organization is responsible for all costs associated with fulfilling their safeguarding requirements and will manage their own record keeping.

Please contact Property and Construction department at the Archdioceses of Seattle if you have specific questions regarding facility use by Outside Organizations: construction@seattlearch.org or 206.382.4851.

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/school. It is the parish/school responsibility to ensure that all appropriate volunteers satisfy the requirements of the Safe Environment Program, both initially and every three years according to the Archdiocesan renewal policy.

You should work with the parish/school Athletic Director to ensure all coaches and assistant coaches on the team rosters are compliant with Safe Environment requirements.

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

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.

All CYO Athletics volunteers must identify in their Virtus profile the parish and/or school that they will be serving at. In addition, be sure that the CYO Coach role is listed in their profile.

Level II Catholic Schools & CYO

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

Level II 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 & CYO

All non-Catholic Organizations must sign-off on the Participant Agreement which includes verification of Safe Environment compliance according to their own organizational safeguarding policy and requirements.

Church Personnel Under Age 18 *Minors Working with Younger Children*

For our purposes, 'minor' is defined as any child under the age of 18. If they have reached their 18th birthday they are considered adults. Minors do NOT create Virtus profiles. (The system will not even allow them to do so.)

Minors do NOT take any type of training. Again, no Virtus profile, no training. Most of them have been exposed to the Teaching Safety lessons from Catholic school or Faith Formation – so they are typically already familiar with Safe Environment prevention and awareness.

- **All minors** must sign a Code of Professional Conduct Form. Provide this form to the parent/guardian who will in turn discuss the information with the minor. Both the parent/guardian and the minor must sign/date the form verifying understanding our Archdiocesan Safe Environment policy in regards to minors who work with younger children.
- Minors age 16 – 18 (prior to 18th bday) must apply for a background check. Use the appropriate manual BGC form (i.e. there is one form for volunteer minors and a different form for employee minors). Their parent/guardian must sign the form giving approval for the search. Do not submit the background check without the signature/date of parent/guardian on the form (in two places).
- Both of these forms (Code of Conduct and BGC Authorization) must be returned to the parish SEP coordinator for processing. The minor may not begin work until all completed forms have been received and background check resulted. All documentation should be retained in paper form permanently, in a special binder or file.
- Minors may not work in a capacity in which they supervise children, unless they themselves are supervised by someone age 21 or older.
- When the minor reaches 18 years old they should be instructed to create their Virtus profile. The manual background check result can then be entered manually into the BGC tab in Virtus. The system will not allow them to submit another BGC if it is within the 3 years, which is good. Simply remember to put the initial one from "minor" into Virtus when they are no longer considered a minor.

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: para-educators, speech therapists, musicians, information technology/computer support, accountants/bookkeepers, and maintenance or 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

Some Independent Contractors are part of a larger organization that has its own safeguarding policy and requirements in place, e.g. a para-educator from the local public school district. It would be appropriate to ask the organization to provide a written statement verifying that the individual is compliant with the Safe Environment policy and requirements of the organization.

If the Independent Contractor is not part of a larger organization and meets the criteria for needing Safe Environment, it is appropriate to have them create a profile in the Virtus Database for management by the parish or school location.

If the Independent Contractor is not in contact with children or vulnerable adults, and therefore does not meet the criteria for Safe Environment requirements, then they do not need to fulfill the requirements. In this case, they should not perform any of the following: contact with minors or vulnerable adults; driving as part of their work for the Archdiocese; or access to cash, checks, or other negotiables.

Virtus Profiles

All Church Personnel over the age of 18 (adults) must create a profile in Virtus to meet and maintain the requirements of the Safe Environment Program. The onus is on the individual to create the profile, meet the initial requirements, and maintain current requirements in order to continue in active service within the Archdiocese of Seattle.

Background Check Submissions

Background checks must be authorized by each individual requesting a criminal background check search. Applications are initiated through the individual's Virtus profile: they are re-directed to the Trak-1 database to give authorization and complete their application. Once submission is complete, the user will be directed back to their Virtus profile to complete any other needed Safe Environment requirements.

Manual background checks are conducted on all minors age 16-17 (prior to 18th birthday) or in other rare cases where an individual user may have difficulty submitting it themselves through Virtus. These steps must be followed:

1. Local SE coordinator obtains the appropriate background check authorization form (adult vs minor, employee vs volunteer) completed by the individual, signed and dated. In the case of minors, a parent or guardian must sign and date the form. Review the form for accuracy before proceeding to step 2.
2. Local SE coordinator submits the criminal background check through the Trak-1 database online application. Be sure to review all information on the preview page. Errors are especially common with incorrect birthdates. Please verify the date of birth prior to submission.
3. Once all information is verified on the application, click the submit button. The report will be available typically within 2-3 days.
4. Local SE coordinator will receive a notification from Trak-1 when the background check is resulted in the Trak-1 database.
5. Record keeping:
 - **Adults:** record the background check "all clear" in the individual's Virtus profile. Please contact the Safe Environment office if you are unsure how to record a manual background check.
 - **Minors:** print the background check report from the Trak-1 database. Staple to the background check authorization form and file in a permanent file in the parish or school office.

BACKGROUND CHECK RETURNED WITH CRIMINAL HISTORY

When the result of a criminal background check returns “flagged” with a criminal history, the Archdiocesan Safe Environment Program Coordinator will review the results to determine if the individual is suitable to work or volunteer with or near minors or vulnerable adults. Possible determinations include but are not limited to:

- All clear: no restrictions or limitations
- Not eligible to drive as part of work for a specified time
- No access to cash, checks, or other negotiables
- No unsupervised access to minors or vulnerable adults
- Not eligible for work of any kind

By law there is a waiting period before a determination is made, to give an individual the opportunity to dispute a background check that they feel is in error. Typically a determination notification will be sent to the location 7-10 days after the individual has been notified of the results.

DESIGNATED EMAIL FOR RECEIVING BGC DETERMINATIONS

Locations are strongly encouraged to set up a designated email address for communicating background check determinations. Many locations no longer use fax machines. To facilitate prompt turnaround of documentation for flagged background check determinations, designated email is preferred because it does not depend on the local coordinator being present at the location to receive the fax in-person.

You can find the Email Protocol on the SEP website here: [Email Protocol for Background Check Determinations](#).

Important Things to Know about the Background Check Process

Social Security Number

The Archdiocese of Seattle does not use the Social Security Number as part of our criminal background search application. Background check searches are conducted using the individual's name and date of birth. No other sensitive information is used.

Credit Reports

The Federal Government considers criminal background checks a type of "credit report" because they are conducted by companies that are considered "consumer-reporting agencies". Although these third party vendors often provide organizations around the United States with credit history, the Archdiocese of Seattle does NOT obtain any financial, credit or other personal information history. The criminal background search is the only information garnered by the Archdiocese of Seattle, and it is only reported after an individual has given authorization for the criminal background search.

Privacy

Remember that background check applications, authorizations and reports contain confidential information. Respect the privacy of your applicants at all times. Background check results and final determinations are confidential information and should not be shared except with your location administrator/principal on a "need to know" basis.

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.

Please contact the Safe Environment office in the event that the Sex Offender Guidelines need to be implemented. 206.382.4285.

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:

- Weekly bulletin inserts
- Intercessions for the Prayer of the Faithful for Sunday liturgies
- Activities for children/youth
- Resources and materials from the USCCB

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.