



DIOCESE OF SYRACUSE SAFE ENVIRONMENT TRAINING OVERVIEW

VIRTUS® Adult Awareness Training

The VIRTUS® *Protecting God's Children* live training program teaches adults how to protect children by making participants aware of the signs of child abuse, the methods by which offenders commit abuse, the reporting procedures for suspected abuse, and the steps we take to build and maintain safe environments for our children. Two videos are the centerpiece of *Protecting God's Children* training: *A Time to Protect God's Children* and *A Plan to Protect God's Children*. All clergy, all religious, and all employees of the diocese as well as any volunteer who comes into contact with children are required to attend this training. Parents and other interested adults are also welcome.

This program has been offered in the Diocese of Syracuse since 2003. The Diocese schedules training sessions in every region throughout the year. Recertification and an updated criminal background check are required every five years.

Safe Environment Training for Children and Youth Catholic Schools Program

The Diocese of Syracuse Catholic Schools use the safe environment education program, *Child Lures Prevention: Think First and Stay Safe* to teach our students personal safety skills through a series of developmental appropriate lessons created for grades Pre-K through 12. This program teaches students to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate behaviors by peers, adults and family members. Students learn to recognize and avoid potentially abusive and unsafe behaviors and situations. But above all, the program encourages children to treat others with kindness and respect – and to expect the same in return.



Catechetical Program

Circles of Care (K – 12) from the Diocese of Manchester, New Hampshire
with accompanying lessons from:

*Sexual Abuse Awareness Training for Children and Youth in Parish
Catechetical Programs* from the Diocese of Albany, New York

This combined curriculum addresses age appropriate personal safety issues for children and youth and is introduced within the context of faith formation/religious education in parish programs. *Circles of Care* sessions for older grades are based on lessons contained in the book Creating Safe and Sacred Places by McGlone, Shrader and Delagatto (St. Mary's Press, 2003).

Kindergarten through Grade 6

The curriculum for grades K through 6 includes age appropriate lessons for each grade with the following general outcomes. The learner will be able to:

- Recognize that respect for self and others is grounded in being created in the image and likeness of God
 - Identify potentially dangerous situations
 - Identify trusted adults
 - Identify places that are safe
 - Demonstrate skills for handling difficult situations
- All these grades also include take-home materials.

Grades 7 and 8

The curriculum for grades 7 and 8 includes lessons with the following general outcomes. The learner will be able to:

- Recognize that respect for self and others is grounded in being created in the image and likeness of God
- Identify potentially dangerous situations, including through the internet
- Name ways to steer away from potentially dangerous situations
- Identify practical tools for creating a safe environment



Kindergarten through Grade 6, continued

Grades 9 through 12

The curriculum for grades 9 and 10 includes lessons with the following outcomes. The learner will be able to:

- Identify the risk factors associated with sexual abuse
- Develop a plan for responding to, and supporting others, in a crisis situation
- Identify tools to identify and steer away from questionable and potentially dangerous situations

Grades 11 and 12 Supplemental Lessons

Lessons on bullying, harassment and hazing are included in this training manual.

Resources for Parents

Talking to Your Children about Abuse
Resources and Guidelines for Parents
Internet Safety Guide

These written materials offer information to parents about the signs and symptoms of abuse, about how to respond and report to suspected abuse of a child, about teaching their children how to protect themselves against sexual abuse, and The Resources and Guidelines document provides parents with additional resources about sexual abuse awareness and prevention. The Internet Safety Guide includes information about online safety resources.





SAFE ENVIRONMENT TRAINING FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN CATECHETICAL PROGRAMS

CURRICULUM OVERVIEW

The foundation for *Circles of Care* is rooted in our faith as Catholic Christians: we are created in God's image and likeness, we share a common dignity as human persons, God's declaration that all creation is "good," and that, created in God's image and likeness, we are called to relationship, to community, and to care for one another, especially those most in need. *Circles of Care* also addresses topics presented in the Catechism of the Catholic Church; in particular, Section Three: Life in Christ (pp. 421-611) which addresses: The Dignity of the Human Person; The Human Community; God's Salvation: Law and Grace; and The Ten Commandments.

The name of the program is rooted in the universal symbol for wholeness, the circle. Throughout the history of humankind, the circle has signified completeness, infinity and the sphere within which communication and dialogue happen best. A variety of cultures have expressed these understandings by gathering physically in circles for decision-making and/or prayer and using rings to symbolize commitment and interrelationship.

The lessons in *Circles of Care* are intended to strengthen and complement the care that is already part of the catechetical ministry. Throughout the lessons, students will be introduced to foundational principles of living our faith, especially personal safety, making good decisions, developing wholesome relationships, and self-esteem. Also included is a letter to parents, an opt-out form for parents to sign if they do not want their child to participate, class activity sheets, and forms for reporting attendance to the Diocese of Syracuse.

In preparing this curriculum, the intention and hope has been that all of the materials will assist parents, catechists and other instructors in continuing the ministry we share with all of you, that of caring for and forming in faith the young members of the Church.



Recommendations for Catechists

In working with the *Circles of Care* program, and the additional lessons plans from the Albany Diocese, educators should understand the basic philosophy that is proper in this approach to education. ***The parent is the primary teacher.*** However, educators, such as catechists, have an important role to play. They assist with the preparation and support of parents; they also provide the moral teaching of the Church for young people in their classrooms.

Educators do get questions from students that require responses. In such situations, educators should ask themselves this question: “What part of this child’s question can be answered from the moral doctrines of the Church and what part is personal developmental information that should be referred back to the parent?” Essentially, specific questions about the physical development or strictly biological information are always appropriate for parents to deal with. If a child seems to have many unanswered questions in this area, the catechist might want to contact the parent and advise them of the matter.

It is important to present this program to the parents in a positive light. Prior to teaching the safe environment curriculum to the children and youth each year, the parish should offer a meeting for parents. Attendance by parents at the parent session is optional, but the session should be offered. The parent session shall address the following:

- General guidelines to assist parents in protecting their children from abuse
- Appropriate boundaries for adults working with children
- How parents can discuss personal safety issues with their children, including touching safety and internet safety
- A review of the content of the parish’s safe environment curriculum for children

Guest speakers, such as law enforcement officials, social workers and counselors from Catholic Charities, may be enlisted to assist the parish in making this presentation to parents. Parishes are required to document the date of the meeting and the estimated number of parents in attendance on a verification form.



Opt –Out forms are to be used by parishes in circumstances where a parent requests that his or her children attending the parish faith formation/religious education program not participate in a particular safe environment lesson. It should be emphasized in the parent meeting and in any other Communications with parents that the safe environment program is not sex education; rather, the curriculum is an abuse prevention program to help create and maintain a safe environment for children and young adults.

Catechists will complete class attendance sheets when the lessons are taught, to give an accurate number of those who are receiving the safe environment program. Pastors and catechetical leaders will complete the parish tally sheets, taking the information from the class attendance sheets, to provide accurate numbers for the parish.

(See *Class Attendance Sheet* and *Tally Sheet* forms, under the Forms section of this instruction manual.)

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) annually audits each diocese to ensure compliance with the principles and requirements outlined in the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*. Consequently, parishes must maintain appropriate documentation of their safe environment programs and procedures. Specifically, each parish is to submit a report to the Diocese stating the number of students enrolled in the parish catechetical program, the number of students trained, the number of students' parents who opted out of the curriculum, and the number of students remaining to be trained.

Every parish is expected to complete the training for children and youth by April 30 of each year. A report form, found in these resources, must be completed and sent by May 15 to:

***Director of Faith Formation
240 East Onondaga St.
Syracuse, NY 13202***

Please keep a copy for your parish records.



Program Acknowledgements

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Some of the documents to be sent home to parents are borrowed and reprinted with permission from:

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