



Safe Environment Training FOR Children and Youth in Catechetical Programs Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why is it important that we include a child safety curriculum at parishes of the Diocese?

Introducing a program for children and youth on personal safety that respects the role of parents as the primary educators of children is part of the commitment made by the Diocese of Syracuse to protect children and young people. *Circles of Care* and supplemental information from the *Sexual Abuse Awareness* curriculum previously used, introduces to students foundational principles of living our faith, especially personal safety, making good decisions, developing wholesome relationships, and self-esteem, all within the context of the religious curriculum for each grade. Article 12 of the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*, which was adopted by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in 2002 provides that dioceses are to maintain “safe environment” programs, including programs for children and youth, which the diocesan bishop “deems to be in accord with Catholic moral principles.”

2. How much time should we expect to spend each year teaching *Circles of Care*?

Circles of Care provides for one lesson (about 45 minutes) for each grade level per year. However, the teachers can, and should, remind students of the lessons and materials learned in the lesson throughout the year.

For the high school *Circles of Care* lessons, parishes have successfully incorporated the curriculum into an extended session, such as a morning or evening retreat experience. Others have divided the lessons into shorter presentations and have covered the material in a series of lessons spaced throughout the year rather than all at once. The high school topics allow for flexibility according to the age and maturity of the group.

3. Is special training required of those who teach the lessons?

The *Circles of Care* manual contains step-by-step lessons, activities, and prayers for each grade. No special training is required.

However, for the junior and senior high school *Circles of Care* lessons, *it is recommended that consideration be given to planning an Orientation Workshop for the adults who will be teaching the lessons.* This will enable the adults to have a better grasp of the curriculum and to express their preference for which lessons they are most comfortable presenting.



4. What if a teacher is uncomfortable teaching the lesson to his or her students?

Some parishes have designated one person (e.g., the Faith Formation/Catechetical Leader, a guidance counselor, a youth minister, a nurse) to teach the lesson in the parish. Parishes can combine classes for the purposes of teaching the lessons.

5. Does the teacher need to follow the curriculum word-for-word?

No – as in all curricula, there will be a need for adjustments based on the students who are in the group, the events happening in our communities and in our world, the comfort level of the instructor, and any other factors influencing the participants. Make these adjustments using your best judgment. Adapt the prayer experiences and the activities as needed. Just be sure to set aside time to teach the appropriate lesson. *The goal is to achieve the outcomes that are outlined for each lesson.* Consult with other instructors who are teaching in your parish program as well as your catechetical leader.

6. When are the parishes required to complete the lessons for the students?

The lesson may be taught any time between June 1 and April 30 each school year. The completed Tally Forms and Declination Forms (if any) are due at the Office of Faith Formation on or before May 15th each year.

7. What if parents do not want their children to participate in the lesson?

Parents can decline their child's participation in the program, but the parish should first explain to the parents what the lesson entails and show them the lesson. The curriculum is available on the diocesan website. After seeing the lesson and the activities, the parent may change their minds. Nevertheless, if they do not want their children attending the lessons, the parents are asked to complete and sign the Declination Form and submit the form to the Faith Formation/Catechetical Leader.



8. What if a student is absent from the lesson because of illness or other commitment?

Parishes should make every effort to hold a make-up day for those who missed the lesson. If this is not possible, the parish will send the lesson home. Sending the lesson to the parent/guardian via email is suggested as an effective method of distribution. However, if a student does not attend the in-class lesson, regardless of whether it is sent home to parents, the student should be counted as absent and included in the “not trained” category.

9. What about Faith Formation students who are home-schooled?

Home-schooled students should be taught the lesson as part of the regular Faith Formation curriculum at home. The lessons will be provided to the parent or adult who home-schools the student and the expectation is that the lessons will be taught. Home-schooled students are assumed trained unless a parent or guardian signs the Declination Form.

10. What if a parent fails or refuses to sign and submit the Declination Form?

The parish can only request that a parent sign and submit the form. **The student must be marked in the record as not having been trained and the parish is required to complete the Declination Form and add a notation explaining that the parent did not return the form.**

11. When and how do we notify the Diocese of Syracuse that the training was completed?

The parish must complete the Tally Sheet and include copies of any Declination Forms. Please send these forms on or before May 15th to:

Diocese of Syracuse
Director of Faith Formation
240 E. Onondaga Street
Syracuse, NY 13202

12. Our parish does not offer Faith Formation classes. Do we still need to complete and submit the Tally Form?

Yes. Please complete the form, but indicate that the parish has “0” students in each grade.



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13. How long do I keep the documentation?

Catechetical leaders must retain classroom attendance sheets, a copy of the Tally Sheet, and copies of the Declination Forms on file for seven (7) years.

14. Where can I get more information about *Circles of Care*?

Additional information regarding the *Circles of Care* program can be found on the Syracuse Diocese website at www.syracusediocese.org under Diocesan Offices/Faith Formation

