

Diocese of Buffalo

Safe Environment Office

Subject: Safe Environment Program Policies

November 11, 2008

The intended purpose of this policy statement is to ensure that all parishes, schools, and Catholic institutions are in compliance with the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* as mandated by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Diocese of Buffalo. The document refers to requirements for all clergy. Additionally, it includes all individuals, employees and volunteers, who have regular access to youth.

All applicants who work with youth must meet the following requirements. Evidence of compliance must be documented and kept locally at the parish, school, or organization. These requirements are each subject to audit.

1. Application for employment or volunteering
2. Code of Conduct – signed by applicant
3. At least two References checked and documented
4. Criminal background check submitted to the Diocese
5. Safe Environment training including the Protecting God's Children Workshop, the ongoing training bulletins and annual re-certification

Much of this document refers to the correct pre-screening process for applicants. Applicants should complete an application for any position for which they apply. The Code of Conduct is to be provided to all applicants before they accept a position since it stipulates rules that the applicant is expected to abide by. Applicants should have references checked and a criminal background check as part of pre-appointment screening. The background check request should be submitted to the diocese prior to appointment, but in no case should there be a delay of more than thirty days from starting an assignment. Positions may be filled "contingent upon the successful completion of a criminal background check".

No employee or volunteer is allowed unsupervised access to youth until they have met the above requirements.

For ALL EMPLOYEES or VOLUNTEERS Who Work with Youth:

1. A completed **employment or volunteer (Volunteer Questionnaire) application** should be completed and kept on file at the location of the hiring entity (parish, school or organization).
2. During the hiring process, at least **2 references** must be checked and documented by the hiring supervisor, preferably an employee. References should not include relatives, if at all possible. References should include former supervisors. If volunteering, references should include supervisors from prior volunteer positions. If the applicant has regular contact with children, references should be told that the applicant may be working regularly with children. The reference should be asked if they would have any concerns about the applicant working alone with or around children. Other questions in the reference check should include a discussion about character and competency to perform the job for which they are being hired. Reference checks should be conducted in person or by phone. A form letter is not an appropriate method of conducting a check of references.
3. All individuals must sign the **Code of Conduct** - to be maintained in a file for the applicant at the local entity's facility. Note that by signing the Code of Conduct, the applicant does give their permission for a criminal background check.
4. All individuals must submit to a **criminal background check**. These checks are conducted by the Diocese in cooperation with information provided by the schools, parishes and organizations. There are no exemptions for those who may have had a background check from previous positions.

5. **Protecting God's Children™ Workshop and Ongoing Training:**

The Protecting God's Children™ workshop is required as an orientation for those individuals (employees and volunteers) who have regular contact with children. The main purpose of the initial training is to help the community become aware of the extent of the problem of child sexual abuse in society, and provide solutions to prevent abuse from occurring. Additionally, periodic training bulletins and annual re-certification are required as follow-up for anyone who is required to attend the workshop.

New employees and volunteers who are required to attend the workshop are required to attend within 90 days of their start date. The local organization may grant a thirty (30) day extension.

Who needs to attend? All adults over the age of eighteen (18) who have regular contact with youth under the age of eighteen (18) are required to attend. Minors, those individuals that are under the age of eighteen, are specifically discouraged from attending this program, as the workshops are formatted for adults. Seventeen year olds may attend with a parent or guardian, however they are NOT required. The final decision on specific job functions that require attendance may be made at the local school or parish level. Some guidelines are listed below to clarify the intent. In the examples below, we are **always referring to adults.**

In the parish: All clergy (priests and deacons), youth ministers, religious education coordinators should attend. All staff or volunteers involved with music, spiritual or sports programs (where youth may be involved) should attend. Eucharistic Ministers who take the Eucharist to homes where youth may be present should attend. All adult catechists should attend. Facilitators for the Children's Liturgy of the Word should attend. The parish secretary should attend as they may be in regular contact with youth.

In the school: All clergy (priests and deacons), priests, deacons, administration, secretaries, guidance counselors, teachers, aides, nurses, cafeteria workers, coaches and maintenance personnel should attend. Any school secretary or administrative staff person is required to attend the training. All employees and volunteers who have regular contact with children including lunch monitors and all parent or community volunteers who come in contact with youth through school programs should attend the training. Volunteers who accompany children on field trips or other school activities should attend. Individuals who are certified social workers or state mandated reporters are NOT exempted.

Scout Leaders. Scout leaders who go through scout training on child sexual abuse prevention are granted an exemption from the diocesan live training, Code of Conduct, Volunteer Questionnaire and criminal background check if their work is limited to the Scouts. Those individuals receive their training and clearance through the scout program. If these leaders work in another ministry in the Diocese, they should participate in the Protecting God's Children™ training.

Ongoing Training Requirement. Periodic training bulletins and annual re-certification are an integral part of the training mandate for everyone who has had Safe Environment training. The Protecting God's Children Workshop provides only an overview of the training program and diocesan policies. Thus ongoing training is an important component of the complete training required for the protection of youth. Individuals who do not comply with the ongoing training requirement will be required to re-take the Protecting God's Children Workshop and continue with the ongoing training components or risk losing their "compliance" in the diocese.

Note on Privacy:

Collection of personal information is essential in order to conduct criminal background checks and reference checks. According to counsel, it is entirely legal and appropriate to request this type of information from all volunteers and employees. In many cases, our volunteers have not been asked previously to provide their personal information as a condition of their ministry. Note that anyone seeking employment will always provide their Social Security Number to their employer. Likewise, it is now necessary for our volunteers to provide this information so that we can protect the safety of our children through criminal background checks. All personal information must be maintained in the parish or school in a secure and locked location so that this information is not available for inappropriate use. Appropriate measures should also be taken to maintain confidentiality of information kept on computers and computer networks. For those instances where information is to be transmitted over the Internet, secure technology, encryption and password protection should be utilized to maintain security. This same level of confidentiality will be maintained at the diocesan level.