



Diocese of Green Bay Safe Environment Training for Children FAQ: 2023 - 2024

The following questions and answers are to assist you in understanding what is required in the Diocese of Green Bay for Safe Environment Training for Children; and will need to be recorded for the July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024, USCCB Safe Environment annual Audit period.

EVERY child enrolled in a Catholic school, or a parish faith formation program must receive education regarding safe environment issues annually. That means every child needs to be “trained” and counted as ‘trained’. Children may also be ‘opted out’ but only at the request of parent(s) or guardian(s). As we looked at questions received and issues present, there appear to be four areas of concern.

1. Training Question:

What is Safe Environment Training, for children, and what qualifies as Safe Environment Training?

The Diocese of Green Bay has requested that Catholic schools devote a minimum of three (3) classes per grade level per year to this issue. Since religious education students attend public schools where this topic is mandated, the Diocese requests these programs devote at least one (1) class per grade level per year to these topics.

The Diocese asks that teaching objectives incorporate the following ten guidelines:

Each human being is created in the image and likeness of God. Our bodies are sacred and holy.

We are blessed with families and loving communities to help us grow.

We must differentiate between safe, unsafe, and unwanted touch.

Because each person is made in the image of God, each person must be treated with dignity and respect. This respect includes respectful privacy of our own bodies.

The God-given gift of choice has consequences.

Some actions or behaviors are wrong or sinful. Behavior or actions that harm self or others physically, psychologically, or spirituality are wrong.

We must differentiate between good and bad play and avoid keeping secrets.

Each of us experiences good and bad human relationships and friendships.

Children and youth must be provided with basic information to enable them to be safe and protected by the adults in their lives. The task of keeping children safe is shared by families, extended families, their neighborhood and community, and their school and church.

Children and youth must identify several trusted adults to go to for help.

2. Lesson Plans:

Safe Environment lesson plans, utilizing the VIRTUS lesson plans for children are available to assist you in incorporating the teaching objectives.

Lesson plans purchased by the diocese from VIRTUS, can be found on the Diocese of Green Bay website: www.gbdioc.org under “Protecting Children” /Lessons Plans & Resources for Children” The VIRTUS lesson plans are expected to be utilized as the main safe environment training material for children but can be supplemented with other material and resources.

Resources and curriculum questions can be directed to Courtney Coopman, Diocesan Assistance Coordinator 920-272-8174, or the Associate Superintendent of Instruction and Academic Accountability, Liz Goldman 920-272-8163 or the Director of Religious Education 920-272-8309.

Can materials simply be mailed out to all families in the parish program or school?

No. On site or face to face training needs to be offered annually to every child enrolled in a parish program or Catholic school.

3. Absent Children:

What should I do if a child is absent from training?

Age-appropriate materials are sent home to the parents of those children that are absent on the day of training. For example, if a parent has children in grades 2, 4 and 8, only the age-appropriate materials for the absent child are sent home. To ensure that materials arrive home, the best way to send them is via the US mail or e-mail. However, you can use other alternatives such as a take home or parent folder.

Can we just offer the materials to be picked up at the parish or school office?

No. This practice does not place enough urgency or importance on the subject matter. Our children deserve to be knowledgeable regarding their physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. *Child sexual abuse can be prevented when children and youth are educated.* As educators and ministers, it is our responsibility to directly present age-appropriate programs or provide materials for parents to utilize at home when children are absent.

Can we refer parents to the diocesan website to get the materials?

No. Though materials are on the diocesan website, it is again our responsibility to make sure age-appropriate materials are provided to the parents of absent children. Additionally, the material provided by the parish or school should be age specific, causing less confusion for the parents.

4. Opted Out Children:

What is the purpose of the Opt Out form?

The Opt Out form is used to substantiate that all children in a school/program are accounted for regarding safe environment training, that such training has been offered to them and that the parent(s)/guardian chose to decline it. The annual USCCB audit **requires** an opt out form for every child whose parents’ decline to have their child attend the safe environment training provided by the parish/school.

Who completes the Opt Out form?

The parent(s)/guardian of the child complete the form and return it to the parish/school office. This form is to remain in the ***child's permanent school or religious education file.***

A copy of each Opt Out form must be sent to the Diocesan Office of Safe Environment for audit documentation.

When should an Opt Out form be used?

The Opt Out form should ONLY be used if a parent declines to have their child attend the safe environment training provided by the parish/school. Therefore, the number of opt out forms that you have on file should be very minimal! Concurrent to the practice of those children that are absent, age-appropriate materials should likewise be sent home to the parents of those children opted out of training.

Where can I get an Opt Out form?

The Opt Out form can be found on the diocese website, www.gbdioc.org under "Protecting Children" /Lessons Plans & Resources for Children". **Please use this form only as the Opt Out Form.**

5. Documentation:

What is the annual Safe Environment Audit Survey?

The annual Safe Environment Audit Survey is distributed to all Local Safe Environment Coordinators (LoSEC) to report the required training information. The Diocese of Green Bay is audited every year for compliance by the USCCB.

Who is responsible for completing the annual Safe Environment Audit Survey?

The LoSEC is usually responsible. The pastor/pastoral leader, faith formation director/coordinator or school principal, should work along with the parish/school LoSEC and other key staff, to ensure data submitted is complete and accurate. The pastor/pastoral leader or school administrators must sign for validity of all Surveys.

What information is required in the annual Audit Survey?

The annual Safe Environment Audit Survey collects data from the time period of July 1–June 30 and adheres to ALL employees regardless of position, but only to those volunteers that have contact with children under the age of 18. (***Volunteers in ministry with individuals at risk adults should not be included in Audit data.***)

Historically, the Survey has always required the total number of educators, employees and volunteers at every parish or school and how many of those have been background checked and completed initial safe environment training, "Protecting God's Children." a VIRTUS training. The Survey also asks if guidelines regarding reporting abuse have been reviewed with employees and volunteers during the audit period.

Every child enrolled in a Catholic school or faith formation program must be counted as trained, absent with materials sent home or opted out. The total number of children enrolled should be equal to the number trained + absent + opted out.

(Example: 150 total children enrolled = 146 present + 3 absent + 1 opt out)

If you have further questions, please contact the Office of Safe Environment at 920-272-8198 or 920-272-8174.



UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

Messages Children Hear In Safe Environment Programs

In Catholic schools and parishes nationwide, Safe Environment training gives children the skills necessary to protect themselves from would-be-offenders. The Associate Director of the Secretariat for Child and Youth Protection of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), has listed here some of the messages children should hear in Safe Environment programs.

1. Abuse is never a child's fault.

The blame **always** belongs to the adult who is taking advantage of a child's trust and vulnerabilities.

2. God loves children forever and wants them to live holy and happy lives.

The shame of child sexual abuse needs to be put where it belongs: on the abuser.

3. Abuse that has happened should be reported.

One study shows that children tell of their abuse an average of nine times before someone believes them.

4. You can recognize abuse when it happens.

Children learn to trust that feeling that says something isn't right and to tell a parent or other trusted adult when something happens that makes them feel uneasy.

5. There are ways to spot a grooming process.

Children learn that anyone who lets children break rules, gives them alcohol or shows them pornography needs to be reported to parents and other trusted adults.

6. Parents or other trusted adults will talk about this subject.

Children often try to protect their parents from bad news, so they need to learn they can tell their parents anything.

7. Boundaries exist.

Children who listen to the voice that says, "This doesn't feel right," can protect themselves.

8. Children can stand up for themselves.

Children learn when it is appropriate for them to say, "No, stop doing that."

9. There are ways to explain inappropriate behavior.

The ability to articulate what has happened to a child enables a child to more easily confide in a parent or other trusted adult. This is ultimately the goal of safe environment education.