

## Safe Environment Program Diocese of Buffalo

### Overview for Administrators



We recognize our essential responsibility to provide a safe environment for children in the care of our schools and parishes. Since 1991, our diocese has provided training to certain groups, including educators, so that they are able to recognize the signs of child abuse, and that they know the steps to take when abuse is suspected. This includes reporting to the proper authorities.

In June of 2002, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops mandated the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, which requires each diocese to provide specific training and mandates a suite of requirements to protect children from child sexual abuse. Our Diocese implemented changes in our existing training program and widened the scope to include all who have regular contact with youth in their work through the Diocese. The updated diocesan policy became effective in the fall of 2003 as the Virtus Protecting God's Children™ workshops and continuing online training were rolled out.

**In addition to training**, more thorough applicant screening was mandated including standardized procedures for all volunteers and employees who have access to youth. These screening procedures include:

1. A standardized application for employment/volunteerism
2. Standards for checking applicant references
3. Criminal background checks
4. Official Code of Conduct

In the first ten years since 2003, the Diocese has trained nearly 35,000 individuals and conducted criminal background checks on about 28,000. The training has provided individuals information about:

1. Steps adults can take to protect children from abuse
2. Tactics child predators use to gain access to youth
3. Indicators that a child may be in harm's way
4. Procedures for reporting abuse to the proper civil and diocesan authorities

By providing continuing training to adults through the Virtus Online™ program, we make every effort to keep child safety a key responsibility of all adults.

The pre-employment/volunteer screening sets standards for local schools and parishes to encourage them to know their applicants better before bringing them on-board so that they can select the best candidates to work with our youth.

Lastly, but equally important is that age-appropriate training is now included in all Catholic schools and religious programs to ensure that children know more about the things they can do to protect themselves from being victims.

We have seen that this program has empowered individuals to communicate their concerns to administrators and the Diocese. We hope and pray that we are helping to ensure a safe environment for our youth.

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### What Do I Need to Know as a Volunteer Who Works With Youth?

**Thank you**, on behalf of your school, parish and the diocese for the work that you are undertaking as a volunteer who works with youth. Our schools, parishes and our diocese would not be able to provide the services that we do without your help. Therefore, no matter how great or small you perceive your contribution, every person who commits their time or talent is very important.

### What do I have to do?

In June of 2002, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops mandated the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, which requires each diocese to provide specific training and mandates a suite of requirements to protect children from child sexual abuse. Our Diocese implemented policies and procedures for all who have regular contact with youth in their work through the Diocese.

**Training.** Safe Environment Training is required for all individuals who have regular access to youth. The diocese allows up to **ninety days** to attend the Virtus Protecting God's Children™ Workshop. However, **during the time that the mandated training and background screening are pending completion, this volunteer is not allowed access to youth without direct in-room supervision.** The Protecting God's Children workshop is considered to be an orientation to a complete training program which provides information about:

1. Steps adults can take to protect children from abuse
2. Tactics child predators use to gain access to youth
3. Indicators that a child may be in harm's way
4. Procedures for reporting abuse to the proper civil and diocesan authorities

Ongoing training through monthly Virtus Online Training Bulletins and periodic Virtus Online Recertifications are required to stay up-to-date with current information on child sexual abuse.

**Registration** for the workshop is available online at [www.virtus.org](http://www.virtus.org)

**Applicant screening.** Each volunteer who applies to assist with youth must expect to undergo a thorough screening process, similar to employment screening. The screening procedures include at a minimum:

1. Completion of a standardized application for employment/volunteerism
2. A face-to-face interview, if possible
3. Submitting references to be checked
4. Submitting to a criminal background check
4. Signing and agreeing to the official Code of Conduct
5. Attending the Protecting God's Children™ workshop and continuing the online training

Thank you again for volunteering. I hope that you can fully appreciate the need to follow these procedures for people who have access to our most precious treasure, our children!