



Diocese of Grand Island

Child Protection Policy

Frequently Asked Questions

Background Screening

- 1. Why is the diocese requesting background screens?** The Diocese of Grand Island screens the background of all individuals (volunteer and staff) who will have regular / supervisory contact with children and youth. This screening is part of the Church's efforts to create a safe environment for children and youth. Screening helps insure that we are not entrusting the care of our youth to individuals who may have a documented history of harm to children, and gives a clear message to those who may have intent to harm that our churches and schools are no easy place to access children.
- 2. What does a background screen include?** Background screening includes checking references and criminal history. References checks are completed as part of the volunteer and employee application process at the parish / school / program where the individual has applied. Applicants also sign consent for a criminal history check. All background authorizations are sent to the Diocese of Grand Island Chancery Office. The diocese contracts Choice Point, a Lexus Nexus Company, to complete criminal history checks.
- 3. Who needs to be screened?** Any individual who will have regular contact with children and youth or who will serve in a supervisory role with children and youth is required by diocesan policy to complete background screening. Additionally, any person under the employ of the Diocese of Grand Island, parishes, or schools within the Diocese of Grand Island is required to complete background screening. Screening may also be requested of volunteers who will have access to protected information regarding children and youth or volunteers serving in a "one time event" who will be supervising youth in the absence of their parents.
- 4. I have been a member of my parish for 25 years. Why do I need to be screened and provide references?** Screening and training of adults who have regular contact or serve in supervisory roles with children and youth is mandated by the USCCB and required policy of the Diocese of Grand Island. As a church we need to follow a consistent plan for screening volunteers and staff who work with children and youth. It is not the case that we assume that everyone is a "would be perpetrator," but we all need to follow the same procedure for screening to be effective. If we are inconsistent in implementing policy, there will be holes, and an individual with ill intent who is seeking access to children will find a way through. We can make no exceptions.

- 5. When did the Diocese of Grand Island begin requiring the training and background screening of all volunteers and staff that work with children?**
The mandate to screen and train all volunteers and staff who have regular contact with children and youth came in 2002 when the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops adopted the Charter for the Protection of Children and Youth. Some parishes and programs in our diocese were already requiring reference checks and various forms of screening prior to 2002. Most have fully implemented the requirements in the last several years.
- 6. Are all dioceses doing background checks and safe environment training?**
Since the adoption of the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People in 2002, all Roman Catholic Dioceses in the United States identify that they have implemented policy regarding the screening and training of volunteers and staff who have regular contact with children and youth. Specific policy varies by Diocese with regard to which individuals meet the criteria of “regular contact,” the type of background screening conducted (e.g. national criminal database searches, references, FBI fingerprint screens, etc.), and the extent of training. All training programs include identification of signs of abuse, warning signs in relationships and procedures for reporting abuse as core information. Establishment of safe environment strategies and codes of conduct for volunteers and staff are also basic to safe environment programs across the country. Not all dioceses participate in the audit process requested by the USCCB to verify implementation of the Charter.
- 7. I completed a background screen for my job. Why can't the diocese use that screen?** The diocese must be able to document that they have made reasonable efforts to screen all volunteers and staff who have regular contact with children and youth. Results of screens conducted by other organizations are generally not available to the diocese and establishing a means of verifying the legitimacy of all outside screens is not feasible. Conducting a screen through the diocese is the most effective means of documenting our screening efforts. Having access to screening results allows us to make effective and pastoral decisions in assigning volunteer positions.
- 8. Will I be informed of the results of my background screen?** If something comes up on the screen, for example social security cannot be verified, or a criminal history is found, you will be contacted by Choice Point / Lexus Nexus. If social security verification or criminal history suggests concerns that may impact one's fit with a given volunteer or staff position, the individual will be contacted by their pastor, administrator, or parish safe environment coordinator to gather more information about the context and implications. If you believe that the record is in error, you will be assisted through choice point / Lexus Nexus in the process of changing your criminal history record.

- 9. I am anxious about sharing my social security number with anyone. Why is it necessary for me to provide my social security number on background authorization forms?** Social security information is necessary as proof of the identity of the individual. The first step in screening is to verify that the individual is who they say they are by verifying that the social security number is valid and has been legally assigned to the individual. This additional verification decreases the likelihood that an individual can falsify their identity (by changing the spelling of their name, details of their date of birth, etc). The social security information is used merely as search criteria and is not provided to any outside entity for their use or storage. Please be assured that social security numbers are treated with security and confidentiality. Original authorization forms are sent to the chancery office, where a criminal history search is conducted through a professional screening company by the Vice Chancellor. They are kept in a locked fire safe cabinet. Social security data is not stored electronically. No financial or credit history information is accessed by the diocese or any contracted entity through this search.
- 10. Can I volunteer if I cannot provide a valid social security number?** An individual who has successfully completed reference checks, a name / date of birth criminal history search, and safe environment training may be able to work with children and youth with constant visual / physical supervision of a fully screened and trained adult. If an individual does not have a social security number or is unable to provide a valid social security number, they will not be able to volunteer in any capacity that involves unsupervised contact with children and youth. Criminal history screening without social security has significant limitations. It is much easier for an individual who is trying to hide their criminal history to falsify name and date of birth information than social security information. Additionally, it is not uncommon to find individuals in a national criminal history database who share the same name and date of birth. The search for an individual with no criminal history may result in a record that includes criminal history data for someone with the same name and date of birth.
- 11. Who pays for the screen? How much does it cost? Does the diocese make money from the screens?** The current practice is for the parish, school, or program with whom the individual has applied to cover the cost of the screen. The current cost of screening is approximately \$7.00 for volunteers and \$16.00 for employees. The diocese does not make any money from the screens, in fact, the cost billed to parishes, schools, and programs is the amount paid to the contracted screening company. The diocesan budget covers all of the staff time involved in conducting the searches, maintaining data, and accounting.

Safe Environment Training

- 12. What is Safe Environment Training?** Safe Environment Training is part of the efforts of the Roman Catholic Church in the United States to prevent the sexual abuse of children. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops states in their 2005 revision of The Charter for Protection of Children and Young People, “Churches, schools and youth organizations must ensure that children and youth who worship, study or participate in activities therein can do so in the safest and most secure setting possible. Parents and caretakers must have confidence in these institutions before they will allow their children to become involved with them.” Safe Environment Training includes: 1) The training of parents, ministers, educators, church personnel, volunteers and others regularly involved with minors as to the abuse of children, including sexual abuse. 2) The training is to address the prevention, identification, response and reporting of such cases.
- 13. Why do I need to be trained?** Screening and training of adults who have regular contact or serve in supervisory roles with children and youth is mandated by the USCCB and required policy of the Diocese of Grand Island. It is not the assumption of the diocese that every adult is a “would be perpetrator,” rather that every adult could be a protector of our children and youth if given the appropriate information. Training helps all adults who work with children and youth recognize signs of abusive relationships and how to report / seek help. Training helps insure that all adults working with children and youth are utilizing strategies to create the safest environment possible for children and youth and helps our parish and school communities be the kind of communities where all adults are “looking out” for the well-being of all of our children and where children and youth can have positive consistent relationships with adults. If all adults in the Church over the past 50 years could have been informed of signs of abuse, how to report, and encouraged to report concerns; a multitude of children could have been spared the trauma of abuse by perpetrators who were serving in leadership roles.
- 14. Where do I go for training?** Each parish, school, and program in our diocese has an individual appointed to facilitate training of their staff and volunteers. In some cases this is the pastor, program director, or administrator. Many parishes and schools have appointed a Safe Environment Coordinator who facilitates trainings, implements safe environment programming, maintains records for the parish / school, and participates in continuing education regarding issues relevant to safe environment programming. Your pastor or administrator can connect you with the individual who facilitates training. Most conduct group training in the fall of the year, at the start of religious education programs and at the start of additional child / youth programs and events throughout the year. Additional review of training materials is often conducted with individuals as needed as they begin employment / volunteer service. The Diocesan Child Protection Office facilitates trainings at the request of parishes / schools / programs, you are welcome to attend any of these trainings and may contact the office for scheduled programs in your area (308)382-6565 or cpo@gidiocese.org.

- 15. If I have already completed Initial Safe Environment Training do I need to be trained again to volunteer for another program / parish / school within our diocese?** It is not necessary to repeat Initial Safe Environment Training. Parishes / schools / and programs offer continuing education for their on-going employees and volunteers. You may be asked to participate in the continuing education or any training specific to an individual program. When individuals complete initial training their post-training review is submitted to the Diocesan Child Protection Office. Their training date is entered into a database, along with the date of their most recent background screen. The safe environment coordinator, pastor, administrator, or director of the program you wish to volunteer for can verify that you have completed the initial training by contacting the Diocesan Child Protection Office.
- 16. How long is the training?** The length of Initial Safe Environment Training sessions depends largely on the number of individuals in attendance, the amount of discussion and questions initiated by participants, and the involvement of participants. There is not a specific time requirement, but rather specific content requirement for training. All sessions must cover signs of distress in children and youth, warning signs in adult / child relationships, signs of abuse, responding to distress and warning signs, abuse reporting procedures, and safe environment strategies. Most sessions take a minimum of one hour to cover core materials and may last two hours or longer, depending on the amount of discussion and additional information necessary to maximize understanding and implementation of concepts. It is important that all sessions cover the same basic information and that none of the key concepts are omitted.
- 17. I have completed abuse prevention trainings as a volunteer for other organizations. Do I need to participate in this training?** Yes, it is important to be familiar with the specific policy, procedures, and behavioral expectations of the diocese. By participating in training at your parish / school / program you develop a shared language for discussing and addressing concerns within your parish / school community. Your previous training and experience can be valuable in helping your parish / school colleagues understand and implement safe environment concepts. Your presence also helps your colleagues see the larger picture – abuse is not just something we need to be aware of in our church setting, but something that impacts children in all areas of their lives. Participating in training with your church / school community helps create the kind of community that helps children build resistance to abuse, be resilient to adversity, and encounter positive adults. As someone with experience in implementing safe environment programs in other settings, your feedback is important as the Church and the diocese works to improve our efforts to protect children and youth.

- 18. I have completed Safe Environment Training in another diocese. Do I need to participate in Safe Environment Training here?** It may not be necessary to repeat safe environment training, though it will be important to familiarize yourself with the specific policies, procedures, and expectations of our diocese. Additionally, your input may be valuable in helping your parish / school implement safe environment concepts and participating in training may help build a shared language for problem solving within your parish / school community. Inform your safe environment coordinator, pastor, administrator, or program director of the location and diocese where you completed previous training. They can contact the Diocesan Child Protection Office to verify completion through the other diocese.
- 19. When will the Church quit requiring Safe Environment Training?** It is unlikely that the Church will discontinue safe environment programming. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops is committed to the protection of children and the healing of those individuals who were harmed by past abuse. Other nations are beginning to emulate the United States Bishops in the implementation of safe environment programs. The content and format of safe environment training may change over time as research reveals more about the best approaches for preventing abuse, and as we integrate safe environment concepts into the daily operations of our parishes, schools, and programs. Ideally, utilizing safe environment strategies and modeling right relationships will eventually become “who and how we are” with children and youth, rather than a separate program we are trained to implement.

Child / Youth Education

- 20. What does our diocese do to educate children and youth in Safe Environment Concepts?** The Diocese of Grand Island requires that all parishes, schools and programs review the “Rules for Adult Child Interactions” with children and youth annually. This single session curriculum “Know the Rules for Adult / Child Interactions,” designed for use in a classroom setting, presents this material in the context of a discussion of rules, in general; a review of God’s Rules (the 10 Commandments) and Gospel Rules (e.g. the Golden Rule); and establishment of classroom rules. Catechists and youth volunteers are encouraged to include discussion points and activities that support abuse prevention and right relationship concepts throughout their ongoing interactions with children and youth. Examples are included in curriculum component resource sheets. All materials are available on the diocesan website at <http://www.gidiocese.org/childprotection/education.php> .

21. Why do we educate children and youth? The education of children and youth is mandated by the USCCB Charter for Protection of Children and Youth as one part of safe environment programming. Article 12 of the Charter states:

“Dioceses / eparchies are to maintain safe environment programs which the diocesan / eparchial bishop deems to be in accord with Catholic moral principles. They are to be conducted cooperatively with parents, civil authorities, educators, and community organizations to provide education and training for **children, youth**, parents, ministers, educators, volunteers and others about ways to make and maintain a safe environment for children and young people. Dioceses /eparchies are to **make clear to clergy and all members of the community** the standards of conduct for clergy and other persons in positions of trust with regard to children.”

It is the goal of our diocese to educate children regarding right relationships and to encourage them to communicate to their parents or other trusted adults when something isn't right – to prevent abuse before it has occurred. We hope to promote the development of healthy relationships across the lifespan of our children, to prevent harm from abuse, and to help them be resilient to adversity.

22. Shouldn't adults be responsible for the safety of children? Yes, adults primarily are responsible for the safety of children. Education of children and youth is only one part of safe environment programming. If we can compare abuse prevention to other types of safety issues, fire prevention, for example. As adults, we take measures to create the safest environment possible, we install smoke alarms, we place matches and lighters in locations not accessible to children, we inspect our homes for hazards, we maintain fire extinguishers, we devise safety plans and escape routes. An important aspect of insuring our children's safety, however, is educating them to avoid playing with matches, to follow an escape plan, to call 911, and to “stop, drop, and roll” if they catch fire. Just as in fire safety, for our children to be safe, we can't stop at just adult efforts, we need to educate our children the qualities of right relationships, the signs of abusive ones, and to seek help if something isn't right.

23. Is safe environment consistent with Catholic Moral teaching? Promoting right relationships and protecting children from abuse is consistent with Catholic teaching regarding the dignity of the human person. Children and most adolescents are concrete thinkers. Teaching children about right relationships and signs of abuse is one of many concrete examples of the love, respect, and dignity that God desires for and expects of us. Children need the clear message that God loves them and does not want them to be harmed... that we, as Church love them and do not want them to be harmed.

24. I am opposed to someone else teaching my child about sexuality. Isn't safe environment training sex ed? Catholic Moral Teaching identifies parents as the first teachers of their children regarding sexuality. First, it is important to differentiate safe environment training from sexual education. A good safe environment program focuses on the precursors to abuse. Typically signs of an abusive relationship can be identified whether or not any sexual contact has occurred. Safe environment training focuses on the rules for right relationships and physical boundaries. It does not explain sexuality, human anatomy, or provide examples of sexual behavior. The USCCB Secretariat of Child and Youth Protection states:

“Training programs for *children and young people* should include age appropriate materials pertaining to personal safety. This includes information about improper touching and relationships. Children are not expected to be fully knowledgeable about child abuse or of the laws governing care of children but they need to know when they should seek assistance from a trusted adult.”

Next, we must recognize that there is value in children receiving clear messages from us as church, including: 1) They are wonderfully and specially created by God, deserving of dignity and respect; 2) God doesn't want them to be hurt, and we, as their church family, don't want them to be hurt; and 3) We support them in seeking help if a relationship isn't right – even if that relationship is with someone in the Church.

25. Isn't it the job of parents to teach their children about safety? What does it have to do with church? It is important for children to hear from us as church for a number of reasons: 1) It is important for children to be safe with us. It is also important for children to feel safe with us. Child abuse incidence rates tell us that a significant number of the children we serve have been hurt in relationships with adults. If we are deliberately different from adults who may have hurt them, we help maintain their faith in others. If we can reassure them that God loves them and wants them to be safe, we can help maintain their faith in God. If we are able to assure children that we care about them and have a plan in place for their safety we help maintain their faith in community. 2) There are fewer and fewer places in a child's life where adults can reinforce their parents' message that they are wonderfully and specially created by God, deserving of dignity and respect – our parishes and Catholic Schools continue to be such places. 3) Not speaking as Church allows for the possibility of spiritual manipulation by an adult with a motivation to harm. We know from our study of abuse by clerics in the Church that spiritual manipulation is not uncommon as a means of coercion. We cannot take the risk that the only “representative of the church” talking to our children about boundaries and relationships is an adult with a motivation to harm. We need to do all we can to help children separate the love of their God and their Church from the human failings of those who may have hurt them.

Victim Assistance

- 25. What should I do if someone reports an allegation of abuse by clergy or another representative of the church?** The Diocese of Grand Island has Victim Assistance Coordinators across the diocese. Presently there are six volunteers with a background in mental health available to take calls from individuals who are reporting abuse or seeking support. Any individual who is reporting abuse by clergy should be encouraged to contact the victim assistance coordinator of their choosing. Victim assistance contact information is posted in all parishes and Catholic schools and is available at <http://www.gidiocese.org/childprotection/victim.php>. Church personnel should report any allegations to the Child Protection Office. Individuals should be informed that allegations regarding a minor will be reported to law enforcement. Adults making allegations should be reminded of their right to contact law enforcement.
- 26. What assistance does the diocese offer to individuals who have been victimized by perpetrators who served as leaders in the church?** The diocese provides emotional support to victims of abuse and helps connect victims with needed services. In the case of abuse by clergy, the diocese will provide assistance to the individual in obtaining therapy / counseling services. Victim assistance coordinators can provide individuals with referrals for therapy services.
- 27. Is there any help for victims of abuse by individuals outside the Church?** Victim assistance coordinators can assist any individual who is seeking emotional support or information regarding available services, how to seek help / report abuse, etc.
- 28. Where do I report abuse that occurred in another diocese?** If you need to report an allegation of abuse that occurred in another diocese, you may call the Diocesan Child Protection Office, or a victim assistance coordinator in our diocese and they can make contact with victim assistance services in the other diocese. The other diocese may make arrangements to contact you directly, or give you the option to meet with a victim assistance coordinator in our diocese to hear your report. Determinations regarding assistance and feedback regarding status of the allegation will be made by the diocese in which the abuse took place. The USCCB provides the name and contact information for diocesan victims assistance at <http://www.usccb.org/ocyp/helpandhealing.shtml> .

29. Why does the church offer assistance to victims? Why should the church pay for the actions of a few individuals? The Church recognizes the need of victims for healing and takes a pastoral approach. The Church's role in reaching out to victims of abuse is not primarily an issue of causation or determination of blame, but rather a recognition that abuse has the potential to negatively impact all levels of an individual's being (physical, spiritual, emotional, social / relational, and cognitive). Jesus calls us to reach out to those in need. Individuals who have been hurt at the hands of someone who served in a leadership role in the church are in particular need of the church's healing and pastoral response. In some cases leadership within the church was responsible for making decisions in clergy abuse cases that did more harm than good. The church recognizes this and the Bishops of the United States have made a strong commitment to protect and heal.