



Safe Environment Coordinator Instructions (2023-2024)

Thank you, once again, for your continued efforts to create and maintain a safe environment for all. As the local Safe Environment Coordinator, you are asked to be responsible for ensuring that these requirements are fulfilled. There are a few changes since last year, including a complete revamping of our diocesan website and the Office of Child and Youth Protection webpages, and all of these requirements and documents are available there, so please read the information carefully and contact us with any questions or comments.

Local Safe Environment Coordinators

Every parish and school is to have a designated local Safe Environment Coordinator appointed by the pastor. In some cases, there is one coordinator for both the parish and school. This person is responsible for maintaining the safe environment records and assuring compliance with diocesan policy. Before the coordinator assumes this role, he/she must first be trained through the VIRTUS program. If there are any changes in local coordinator assignments, or a local coordinator needs help, please notify the Diocese Office of Child and Youth Protection.

Local Safe Environment Coordinator Training Video

Each year, the Office of Child and Youth Protection disseminates Instructions for designated local Safe Environment Coordinators in every parish and school. We are constantly striving to improve the process and make changes when necessary. Your efforts and support in this mission and ministry are key to protecting minors and vulnerable adults.

Since most local coordinators are volunteers, we want to respect the time it takes to complete these required tasks. A training video is available online on the VIRTUS webpage and may be accessed at a convenient time. If you have already viewed this training, you are not required to view it again; however, keep in mind that it is available and is a good reference.

If you are a new coordinator or school principal, please take the time to view this training before the fall schedule becomes so busy. After watching the video, please contact the Office of Child and Youth Protection (OCYP) to confirm you've completed that training and provide your feedback.

This is good reference information for all school principals, even if you are not the local coordinator at your school. After viewing, if you would like to have local coordinator rights on your VIRTUS account, to be able to determine if your employees/volunteers are following diocesan safe environment policies, please contact the OCYP.

Checklist for Local Safe Environment Coordinators:

1. Local Safe Environment Coordinators/Supervisors will assist new employees and volunteers to ensure they have registered for the required online Safe Environment Trainings (VIRTUS *Protecting God's Children*© and VIRTUS *Mandated and Ethical Reporter Training*©), completed the *Background Disclosure and Authorization* form, and completed and submitted the current *Code of Conduct*.
2. The local coordinator/supervisor will also coordinate or confirm that copies of the signed documents are sent to the Office of Child and Youth Protection through the confidential fax to **888-820-6032** or by USPS mail.
3. In early September, the local designated Safe Environment Coordinator should communicate with all adult leaders and supervisors who are responsible for programs involving minors or vulnerable adults (**any parish, school, or diocesan sponsored activities involving minors, including parish school of religion programs, youth ministry, scouts, children's choir, or other such programs and those who minister to those in hospitals, nursing homes, or the homebound**) and request a list of all of their currently active adult volunteers. The leaders, supervisors, and volunteers who regularly engage in these activities with minors or vulnerable adults must be properly screened, trained and have a current Code of Conduct.
4. Maintain a list of all church or school employees and current volunteers and submit this list along with the Report of completion by April 15, 2024 (See section "The Master List spreadsheet for recording Employees and Volunteers" below).

The Code of Conduct and Background Disclosure and Authorization forms:

The annual *Code of Conduct* and the *Background Disclosure and Authorization* forms are made available as a pdf (printable document format) through the VIRTUS website and on the Diocesan Office of Child and Youth Protection webpage. A signed paper copy of each of these documents should be submitted to the designated local Parish or School Safe Environment Coordinator and sent to the Office of Child and Youth Protection.

Each parish or school should retain the signature page of the *Code of Conduct* as well as the original copy of the *Background Disclosure and Authorization* form in a secure, locked manner. These forms are to be sent to the Diocesan Office of Child and Youth Protection via confidential fax **888-820-6032**, or mailed to the Office of Child and Youth Protection at the address below. It is the policy of the diocese to retain personnel records (including copies of these forms) for five years past the individual's end of employment or volunteer service in a secure locked location.

We request the 2023-2024 Code of Conduct from all current employees and volunteers be submitted to this office as soon as you receive them and ideally before by October 16, 2023. On January 1, 2024, the VIRTUS accounts will be inactivated for individuals who do not have a current 2023-2024 Code of Conduct recorded. Adults who are not in compliance should refrain from supervising or working with minors and vulnerable adults until all safe environment requirements have been met.

Employees and volunteers

All diocesan personnel, including clergy, parish and school employees, and all adult volunteers who regularly work with children or vulnerable adults must be in compliance with the following diocesan safe environment requirements:

- 1. Complete the required Safe Environment Training, VIRTUS Protecting God's Children®.** The training may now be completed in-person or online. A new employee or volunteer can find the VIRTUS training workshop schedule through the supervisor or on the [Child and Youth Protection webpage](#) and then to www.VIRTUS.org, to register for the training. **Please be aware that any new VIRTUS registrant will now be required to complete two online training sessions: VIRTUS Protecting God's Children 4.0 as well as Mandated and Ethical Reporter Training 1.0.** When the online training (*Protecting God's Children training for adults*) is selected, they will automatically be registered for the online *Mandated Reporter Training*. Both must be completed before they are considered fully trained.

Additional training for those working or volunteering with vulnerable adults now available.

Please note: Safe Environment education and training has been expanded to address vulnerable adults. Adults who are employed or volunteering with vulnerable adults are encouraged to also take the VIRTUS *Vulnerable Adults Training Module*. This will help increase their knowledge of particular issues, concerns, and boundaries when dealing with this unique population. If there are employees and volunteers who may benefit from that training, please contact the Office of Child and Youth Protection so that it can be formally assigned to them from their VIRTUS account.

- 2.** If an individual has already completed the VIRTUS training in our or another diocese, and their account in the previous diocese remains active they are not required to re-take the training (please see [Safe Environment Policy Addendum](#) below). If an individual is coming from another diocese, please provide the OCYP with the transferring person's name, previous diocese, parish, and approximate date of original training. We will then contact VIRTUS to have the records transferred.

Those individuals who attend a live in-person VIRTUS training must sign the attendance form at the beginning of the meeting, and must remain present for the entire workshop for it to be considered successfully completed. The *Code of Conduct* and the *Background Disclosure and Authorization* forms are included in the handouts given to each training attendee.

As noted above, an online option for the adult training is now available. The applicant will register at the same website listed above.

3. Complete and submit a *Background Disclosure and Authorization* form.

Carefully and legibly complete the *Background Disclosure and Authorization*. This should be given to the supervisor or designated local Safe Environment Coordinator. (Complete, sign, and return only page one.) ([English](#)) ([Spanish](#)) (parish/school is to retain page 1 in their records as well as fax a copy to the diocese.)

4. Must annually review, sign and submit the *Code of Conduct*.

([English 2023-2024](#)) ([Spanish 2023-2024](#)) ([Vietnamese 2023-2024](#))

This includes the Background Questionnaire (on page 5 of the Code). This form is typically made available at the beginning of each fiscal year, by July 1st (parish/school is to retain page 5 in their records as well as fax a copy to the diocese.)

The parish/school is to retain the signature page of the *Code of Conduct*. Pages one (1) through four (4) of the Code should be retained by the employee or volunteer.

Both, the *Background Disclosure and Authorization* along with the signature page (five) of the *Code of Conduct* (which includes the Background Questionnaire) is to be sent to the Office of Child and Youth Protection via confidential fax to **888-820-6032** or via USPS mail. If there are any affirmative answers or indications on the Background Questionnaire or in the Background Check Report, the Pastor, Principal, or Supervisor will be contacted by our office. We may also contact and discuss the information with the employee/volunteer.

5. Clergy, employees, catechetical leaders and other volunteers may be required to read monthly training bulletins and to complete other relevant training as assigned and/or provided by their supervisor or by the diocese.

Safe Environment Policy and Procedures—Addendum

There are a few compliance issues that need further clarification, particularly with regards to Safe Environment Training, Background Screening and Code of Conduct for those who are transferring from another diocese and for individuals whose VIRTUS accounts are inactive and need their accounts reactivated.

The Addendum and other required forms are available on the Child and Youth Protection webpage <https://dioscg.org/child-youth-protection/> under the Support & Assistance section and also through the link: [Addendum to the Safe Environment Policy and Procedures](#).

Local Safe Environment Coordinators, Pastors, and Principals, please keep a copy for reference.

Current Diocesan Personnel

Current diocesan personnel, which includes clergy, parish and school employees, as well as adult volunteers who regularly work with children or vulnerable adults, are required to annually complete the Background Questionnaire (included on page 5 of the Code), read, sign and submit the *Code of Conduct*. The Code of Conduct is typically made available at the beginning of the fiscal year, July 1st. The *signature page* is to be sent to the Office of Child and Youth Protection via confidential fax at **888-820-6032**, or mailed each Fiscal Year (which begins July 1st).

The parish or school is to retain the signature page of the *Code of Conduct*. Pages one (1) through four (4) of the Code are to be retained by the employee or volunteer. Clergy, employees, catechetical leaders and other volunteers may be required to read monthly training bulletins and to complete other relevant training as assigned and/or provided by their supervisor or by the diocese.

VIRTUS Children’s training *Teaching Safety-Empowering God’s Children* Lessons for 2023-2024

The lessons are required for each child in Kindergarten through 12th grade who attends Catholic School or any parish religious education class. **If your parish will not be holding in person classes and parents will be teaching the Children’s VIRTUS classes at home please let us know.**

We can now offer a *Lesson Leader Orientation*

This orientation is available through the individual’s VIRTUS account and must be assigned by our office. Please contact us with names of individuals who need this training assigned to them.

Lesson 2 is to be taught during the 2023-2024 school year. Please note that the lesson has enough material that it can be split into two sessions. It is suggested that Lesson 1 is taught before December 1, 2023 followed by a review of Lesson 1 in the Spring of 2024 with the children and include activities not covered during the Fall session.

The second part should be completed by March 1, 2024. The current lessons are available on the VIRTUS website and the OCYP page. **Parishes or schools incorporating *Theology of the Body* into their curriculum may use the *TOB* lessons instead of the second VIRTUS lesson in the Spring.**

VIRTUS lessons are available to those who have the “Educator” tab on their VIRTUS accounts and will also be posted on the OCYP webpage. If you need help with the VIRTUS lessons for children contact the Diocese. Please verify that the materials are current and discard copies of previous lessons. Principals and Parish Catechetical leaders should ensure teachers and catechists use the new lessons this year.

Statement for Parish and School handbooks or parent information

The following statement is to be included in parish and school handbooks or parent communications each school year. If you have not already communicated similar information for the current academic year, please print in the parish bulletin. Parishes and schools are **not** to send a permission form or special letter to parents regarding the safe environment lessons. The OPT OUT form is **not** to be automatically sent home each year. It is used only if a parent tells the parish they do not want their child trained, and after a parent has reviewed the lessons and spoken to the pastor about why they do not want their child trained.

The announcement (below) may be adapted to fit your parish or school situation:

The Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau is committed to helping children learn and grow in a healthy and safe environment. _____ (Parish/School) remains committed to following Diocesan Safe Environment Policy and Procedures and other related policies.

In accordance with the USCCB Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, the Safe Environment training program, the VIRTUS Protecting God’s Children – Teaching Touching Safety (commonly referred to as “VIRTUS”) is used in the Diocese. Students in grades Kindergarten through 12th grade participate in two safety lessons each school year; one in the fall and one in the spring.

The Safe Environment Procedures and other related policies of the Diocese include training on how to recognize, prevent and report abuse. All adult employees and volunteers who regularly work or volunteer with minors receive this initial training as well as ongoing training and background screening.

These documents are available at the Diocesan Child and Youth Protection page www.dioscg.org or <https://dioscg.org/child-youth-protection/>. An overview of the children’s training is available on the diocesan website and copies of these documents and the children’s lessons are available at the office.

We sincerely appreciate all of the efforts and your continued support for this mission and ministry of protecting all of our children, young people and vulnerable adults.

Report of Completion (Parish) (School)

The Report of Completion is to be submitted to the Office of Child and Youth Protection no later than April 15th each year. Every parish, mission or school is required to submit a Report of Completion with the pastor’s signature even if there are no religious education classes held at your location. This form is to be included with a list of current employees and active volunteers.

The Master List spreadsheet for recording Employees and Volunteers

The Master List is to be maintained for each audit year (July 1-June 30) and a copy faxed/mailed to the Diocese for verification, along with the Report of Completion by April 15th each year. First record the names of your employees and volunteers, **then** go to the VIRTUS database to verify compliance. Auditors may ask to see this list. Note that the names of all employees, along with volunteers who have regular contact with children anytime during the audit year are to be recorded. **Do not** list everyone who has had a background check or been VIRTUS trained at your location. **Do not** submit a master report from the VIRTUS website. The template is available online as well as by clicking the link below.

[Parish PDF format](#)

[School PDF format](#)

Annual Safe Environment bulletin/newsletter announcement

The following text is to be printed in the parish and school bulletin or newsletter every year. Keep a copy of the bulletin in the safe environment file and also please send a copy of the bulletin to the Office of Child and Youth Protection. Parishes are encouraged to print this announcement regularly throughout the year.

*Any suspected or known abuse of a minor must first be immediately reported to the **Missouri Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline at 800-392-3738**. Suspected or known abuse of adults to the **Missouri Adult Abuse and Neglect Hotline 800-392-0210**. Suspected or known abuse may also be reported to law enforcement agencies.*

*Additionally, all diocesan personnel are required to report violations of The Code of Conduct for Clergy, Employees and Adult Volunteers of the Diocese, Parishes, and Schools to the Diocese Director of the Office of Child and Youth Protection at 417-866-0841 or childandyouthprotection@dioscg.org. Concerns may also be discussed with your supervisor, the Diocesan Director of the Office of Child and Youth Protection, or a Victim Assistance Coordinator. Violations and concerns may also be reported using the TIPS online reporting system, accessible through the Diocesan webpage, www.dioscg.org. Violations involving the Bishop should also be reported to the **Catholic Bishop Abuse Reporting Service** at <https://reportbishopabuse.org/> or **800-276-1562**.*

Failure to Report is a Class A Misdemeanor for a person who is required under the law to report. No supervisor may interfere with or impede the reporting of suspected abuse. Filing a False Report is also a Class A Misdemeanor.

The Safe Environment Policy and Procedures, the Code of Conduct for Clergy, Employees and Adult Volunteers and other important information, including a link to the USCCB Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, go to <https://dioscg.org/child-youth-protection/>.

If you are unable to access the website or desire printed information, contact the Diocesan Office of Child and Youth Protection at 417-866-0841.

Note to Pastors and Principals

Visiting Clergy: Any clergy not incardinated in the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau who will minister in your parish or school must first receive faculties from the Bishop. Contact the Chancellor, Deacon Rob Huff, at the Diocesan Office.

Registered Sex Offenders: As Pastor or Principal, if you become aware of a person who is a registered sex offender and attending Mass or other activities in your parish or school, please contact the Diocese Office of Child and Youth Protection immediately to coordinate a safety plan. The Parish or School Attendance Agreement should only be used after consultation with the Director of Child and Youth Protection.

TIPS online incident reporting system

The TIPS online reporting system is available on the diocesan webpage to enhance efforts to prevent harm to children and assist with confidential documentation of reports. This system is available for reporting a variety of risk management situations, and furthers the efforts for accountability. The information for making a report is available at the link: <https://dioscg.org/child-youth-protection/>. Contact the Office of Child and Youth Protection for additional information.

Scouts

If a parish charts a Boy or Girl Scout troop, or similar group, the parish is responsible for that troop. Therefore, leaders need to comply with Diocesan Safe Environment Procedures, even if they are not parishioners. Compliance includes attending the VIRTUS safe environment training, background screening, and signing the Code of Conduct. This is in addition to whatever the scout organization requires. Parishes may ask the scout leaders to reimburse the parish for the cost of the background check. Scout Leaders are not required to read monthly bulletins.

Knights of Columbus

Knights of Columbus members who regularly engage in activities where minors and vulnerable adults are present are required to be in compliance with diocesan Safe Environment Policy. Each Knight is requested to follow the same procedures as an adult parish or school volunteer and complete the Safe Environment Training {VIRTUS}, Background Disclosure and Authorization, and the annual Code of Conduct.

Minors who work with other Minors

The Safe Environment Policy and Procedures includes the *Code of Conduct for Minors in Grades Seven through Twelve* ([English](#)) ([Spanish](#)). This is to be used for volunteers under age 18, for Camp Re-New-All and other diocesan and parish activities where minors in grades seven through twelve have regular contact with other minors. Other examples include parish child care, Vacation Bible School, and parish religious education programs. Catholic schools are not required to use this form, but may choose to do so. The form is intended as an educational tool for teens and their families. Note: The form is to be sent home to parents/legal guardians to review and sign with the minor child. The form is not to be given directly to the minor.

Safe Environment Posters

Every parish and school should display the Safe Environment posters with the reporting procedures prominently in public gathering areas. Contact the office for more stickers and additional posters. **This is a requirement of the Charter and policy of the diocese.**

English <https://dioscg.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/ProtectandHealPoster2022.pdf>

Spanish <https://dioscg.org/wp-content/uploads/ProtectHealPoster032521Spanish.pdf>

Vietnamese https://dioscg.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/PromiseToProtect_Vietnamese-031020.pdf

Spanish Language Resources

New employees and volunteers can go to www.VIRTUS.org to complete registration and forms in Spanish. Click [Español](#) on the left side of the page. Spanish language trainings are available also upon request from the Diocese.

Vietnamese Language Resources

A limited number of resources are available in Vietnamese, including the VIRTUS adult training. Contact the Diocese for assistance.

Other Languages

If there is a need for resources or trainings in other languages, please notify the Diocese.

Thank you, again and always, for your work, support, and dedication in this mission and ministry of protecting the children, young people, and vulnerable adults in your parish, school, and our diocese.

Respectfully,



William Holtmeyer, Jr., MS, NCC, LPC, CEAP
Director, Office of Child and Youth Protection