
SAFE ENVIRONMENT



PROTECTING OUR YOUTH IN
FAITH FORMATION AND YOUTH MINISTRY

INTRODUCING THE TEAM

-
- Cathy Wiswell –
Safe Environment Coordinator
 - Sep@seattlearch.org
 - Denise Aubuchon - Victim
Assistance Coordinator
 - helpline@seattlearch.org

SAFE ENVIRONMENT PROGRAM OVERVIEW

- Background Checks
- Safe Environment Personnel Policies
- Training
 - Protecting God's Children for Adults
 - Teaching Safety – Children in Catholic Schools, Faith Formation, and Youth Ministry Programs.

COMPLETE YOUR SAFE ENVIRONMENT REQUIREMENTS

Before the Ministry year begins, complete your own Safe Environment requirements

1. Create profile on Virtus Database
2. Complete your background check *Completed before beginning service
3. Complete training requirement. *Training must be completed within 30 days of hire
 1. Initial Training Protecting God's Children
 2. Continuing Training Module: Assigned to you every 3 years
4. Check with you Parish's Safe Environment Coordinator with any questions

Virtus Online: [VIRTUS® Online \(virtusonline.org\)](http://VIRTUS® Online (virtusonline.org))

SAFE ENVIRONMENT REQUIREMENTS FOR VOLUNTEER CATECHISTS

As the Ministry year begins, ensure that your volunteer catechists complete their Safe Environment requirements as well

1. If they have ongoing oversight of children for the duration of the ministry year
2. Create new profile in Virtus or access their current one
3. Background check *Completed before beginning service
4. Training *Completed within 30 days of beginning volunteer work
 - New Volunteers: Initial training Protecting God's Children
 - All other volunteers: Current online module
5. Background check and continuing training module assigned every 3 years as required update
6. Refer volunteers to your parish Safe Environment Coordinator with any questions

Virtus Online: [VIRTUS® Online \(virtusonline.org\)](https://virtusonline.org)

TRAINING PURPOSE

- **Adult Training**
 - The purpose of the adult training is to spread awareness of the prevalence of abuse and what the church is doing to combat the problem.
 - The adult training is also focused on ensuring that every adult who has contact with minors or vulnerable adults knows what to do if they observe any warning signs or signs of abuse.
- **Children's Training**
 - The purpose of the children's training in Faith Formation and Youth Ministry programs is to empower children. This training teaches children about healthy boundaries, how to identify safe adults to talk to, and most importantly, that they have a right to say what is and is not comfortable or acceptable.

A REMINDER ABOUT COMMUNICATING WITH FAMILIES

What's the best way to communicate with your students and their families?

- Phone/Email/Text Messaging
- Avoid exclusive communication with minors
- Address all communications to parent/guardian with a cc to the student
- Any information intended for the student should include the parent/guardian

LOGISTICS

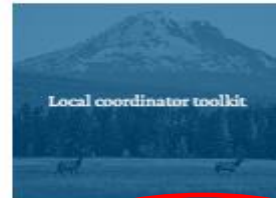
ALL RESOURCES FOR PRESENTING THE TEACHING SAFETY LESSONS CAN BE FOUND ON THE ARCHDIOCESE WEBSITE:

- [HTTPS://ARCHSEATTLE.ORG/FOR-PARISHES/SAFE-ENVIRONMENT/SAFE-ENVIRONMENT-PARISH-FAITH-FORMATION-AND-YOUTH-MINISTRY-EDUCATORS/](https://archseattle.org/for-parishes/safe-environment/safe-environment-parish-faith-formation-and-youth-ministry-educators/)

Four Step Process

- Step One: Educate Yourself
- Step Two: Educate The Parents
- Step Three: Provide the Lesson
- Step Four: Record the Lesson

Toolkits



Resources



STEP ONE: EDUCATE YOURSELF

[HTTPS://ARCHSEATTLE.ORG/FOR-PARISHES/SAFE-ENVIRONMENT/SAFE-ENVIRONMENT-PARISH-FAITH-FORMATION-AND-YOUTH-MINISTRY-EDUCATORS/](https://archseattle.org/for-parishes/safe-environment/safe-environment-parish-faith-formation-and-youth-ministry-educators/)

Please Read:

- *Teaching Boundaries & Safety*
- *Founding Principals*
- Both articles are designed to help you understand the concepts and objectives being taught within this program to ensure that youth are provided the tools they need to protect themselves.
- Familiarize yourself with the lesson plans and activities


STEP TWO: EDUCATE THE PARENTS

- Parents are provided resources about training:
 - *Teaching Boundaries & Safety*
 - *Founding Principals*
- Two weeks before you plan on conducting the lesson inform your parents that their youth will be provided a *sexual abuse prevention lesson*. You can do this through bulletin announcements, flyers or any other means of communication.
- In your communication you must specify that parents have the right to opt out of these lessons, include the Opt Out form. (Available on the website – Parish Religious Education & Youth Ministry Toolkit)

Sample bulletins and flyers can be found: <https://archseattle.org/for-parishes/safe-environment/safe-environment-parish-faith-formation-and-youth-ministry-educators/>

SAMPLE OPT OUT FORM

- Editable Word document
- Make sure to send a copy with the final recording form to the Safe Environment Office
- Any person who is not present, and did not formally opt out, is considered **absent**.

 **Empowering God's Children Youth Safe Environment Program**
Information Sheet & Opt-Out Option

[Date]

Dear Parents and Guardians,

In an effort to assist in the monumental mission of protecting children from abuse, the [Location] is partnering with you to present a safe environment lesson to your youth within their youth program. It is our cherished role as adults to fully protect children. In addition, we must also teach children about their safety rights and boundaries, so that they have tools to protect themselves.

This school year, your child will be presented with a program entitled *Empowering God's Children*, in which Lesson Leaders present a safety lesson to children that houses a grade-appropriate video component along with a hands-on activity. The material is designed to better equip your child to know their rights, recognize their boundaries, and to empower them to protect themselves when safe adults are not immediately available—and ultimately be safer from people who might want to harm them. Youth will participate within one of the following lessons:

Lesson 1: *Physical Boundaries: Safe and Unsafe Touching Rules* Lesson 3: *Boundaries: You Have Rights!*
Lesson 2: *Safe Adults, Safe Touches and Special Safe Adults* Lesson 4: *Secrets, Surprises and Promises*
Lesson 5: *Being a Safe Friend*

As the primary educators of your children, parents and guardians are encouraged to review these materials ahead of time and discuss the information at home. If you have ever thought about how to empower children to protect themselves, fortify their boundaries or increase their safety through in-person and online situations, then reviewing the lessons on your own to both begin and reiterate the message at home is the best next step to take.

Thank you for your partnership with us to protect youth.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION:

Date(s) of in-program training: _____

Makeup training dates: _____

For questions, or to obtain access to the specific lesson and related activities, please communicate with:
(Name / Position / Contact information) _____

Please note: You also have the ability to “opt” the youth out of the formal in-program safety lesson if you only plan to provide safe environment education at home. Please complete, detach and submit the form below if you do not want your child to receive safe environment information via their youth program about ways to protect themselves. Your coordinator will reach out to you regarding relevant protocol, i.e., child separation from others during lesson, alternative activities, etc.

TO OPT-OUT THE CHILD FROM THE SAFETY LESSON, RETURN THIS PORTION TO:

(Name / Location) _____, **BY (Date)** _____

I, (printed name of parent or guardian) _____, have reviewed the safety lessons and DO NOT give my permission for this location to present the *Empowering God's Children* Safety Lesson to my child (printed name of child) _____ Grade _____


Parent Signature _____ Date _____

STEP THREE: PROVIDE THE LESSON


- All lessons for Kindergarten - High School can be found on the webpage: <https://archseattle.org/for-parishes/safe-environment/safe-environment-parish-faith-formation-and-youth-ministry-educators/>
- These are general lesson plans that can be customized to meet your group's needs.
- Mixed age groups should be taught the lowest age group's lesson.

STEP FOUR: RECORD THE LESSON


Anyone providing the lesson will need to fill out a “Recording Form,” located on: [Safe Environment Faith Formation and Youth Ministry Educators Toolkit](#).



You will compile all the data from the various class levels onto one single form.



These forms must be submitted to the Safe Environment office due on or before **April 15th** of each year.



Any Opt Out Forms signed by parents must be returned and sent with the final recording form to the SEP Office.

COMMON QUESTIONS

How will you communicate to parents?

- Best practice would be to communicate using the bulletins initially and email to enrolled families that their children will be offered a sexual abuse prevention course.

What about parents who don't want their youth to participate in the class?

- Catechetical leaders will offer an opt out form.

What about absent students?

- Catechetical leaders will not have to worry about those students who are absent on the one day they provide the lesson.

What if the 15th of April is a weekend?

- The form is still due by the 15th, no matter the day of the week. Forms can always be sent in advance.

SIMULATIONS

Simulations are found on the backside of the handout



At your tables, discuss the first and second scenarios

QUESTIONS?

