

In the case of field trips, a permission form is required as well as instructions concerning emergency care. The other case involves those who are qualified to enter into a formal and long-term counseling situation with a child. It is always preferred to obtain the permission of both parents for these situations. This same preference would hold in the case of parental separation.

**When is it appropriate for me to meet alone with a child or teenager?**

It is advisable to try to avoid these situations as much as possible. If necessary however, a simple way to handle such a situation is to use the *other person nearby* rule. Inform a colleague or any other adult that you will be spending time with the child alone. Ask them to be nearby the open door to the room used for the meeting.

**Is it alright to counsel a teenager in my home or in living quarters if the parents say it's O.K.?**

Even with parental permission, it is unwise for you to spend time alone in your home with an individual child for any reason. Use alternate sites, never meet alone with the child, and always use the "other person nearby" rule. (see above)

## Behavior

**Does this policy forbid coaches and other adult supervisors from drinking alcohol (with other adults, of course) when away on overnight trips?**

Adults are never permitted to use alcohol while participating in youth activities during the time they are responsible for supervising youth.

**What if a child or youth asks me for a ride home? What if the parents forgot to pick up a child and I'm the last one in the building?**

The following action is suggested. Have the child call home. If the parents cannot be reached, the adult would attempt to call the child's parent(s). If the parent cannot be reached, the child should be taken home and not left alone at the building. The child's physical protection takes precedence over strict adherence to the policy.

## Victim Assistance

**To whom can I refer a child or minor who has been sexually abused? Should I make the referral?**

For immediate guidance, call *ChildLine*,  
1-800-932-0313

**What about an adult who was abused as a child by a church employee? Who should they call? What help is available?**

Dr. Robert Nelsen is the Victim Assistance Coordinator for the Diocese of Erie. Dr. Nelsen, who is a Licensed Psychologist, works comprehensively and confidentially to assist victims in obtaining outpatient counseling, facilitate spiritual and mental health support services and maintain contact in order to insure that the counseling provided is helpful. He is also available to provide victims with valuable information and resources for promoting healing, stability and security.

Dr. Nelsen's phone number is (814) 871-7723 and his e-mail address is [nelsen001@gannon.edu](mailto:nelsen001@gannon.edu).

You may also call:

Msgr. Robert Smith, 814-824-1130

Msgr. Mark Bartchak, 814-824-1140

Mr. Robert McCrarey, 814-456-2091

Mrs. Karen Streett, 814-824-1222.

## School Situations

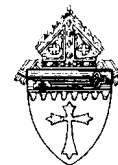
**Are child abuse training and in-services eligible for Act 48 hours?**

Yes. *Act 48* hours will be given for an event lasting 1.5 hours or longer.

**What about people who do not qualify as diocesan personnel but still work with the children, such as Title I and Act 89 personnel?**

These personnel would be cleared and trained by their own employer or agency. They do not have to sign diocesan compliance forms or be in-serviced by the diocese.

# Frequently Asked Questions about the Child Abuse Policy



**Roman Catholic  
Diocese of Erie**

## Introduction

Consider this: *1 of every 4 girls and 1 of every 6 boys* in this country have been abused by the time they are 18 years of age. These shocking figures cannot be ignored! In June of 2003, the Diocese of Erie amended its *Policy for the Protection of Children and Youth* and revised the policy in June of 2007. Since the promulgation of this amended policy, one of the most frequently asked questions is: "These rules and regulations make no sense to me, a lot of needless work. What's the big deal?" The big deal is the safety and well-being of our children!

The Diocese of Erie is dedicated to providing a safe environment for all children and youth. Child abuse is not just a "church" problem. This tragedy is rampant in our society and as people of faith, we must take action to make a difference in the lives of children. This brochure answers some common questions regarding the diocesan policy for child protection. It is not intended to be all inclusive: please contact the diocesan Office for Protection of Children and Youth (814-824-1222 or 814-824-1130) with further questions and concerns. Also, check the diocesan web page at [www.eriecd.org](http://www.eriecd.org) for more information.

## General

**Don't "they" understand that it is nearly impossible to get volunteers as it is - how many more of these rules and regulations are we going to get before we just don't have anyone who will volunteer?**

The diocese understands that screening volunteers may make a difficult situation even more complex. It is hoped however, that potential volunteers will recognize the necessity for careful scrutiny and appreciate the concern for them and for our children which the Church demonstrates with this policy. The time when "just anyone" can volunteer is over.

**If I am a Girl Scout leader or a coach, to whom am I responsible?**

A coach or Girl Scout leader would be responsible to the pastor of the parish in which the person is involved with children and youth. The pastor is ultimately responsible for child/youth protection in the parish and for compliance with the diocesan policy for the protection of children. The pastor may appoint an individual to assist him in this task.

## Clearances & Screening

**Who pays for clearances? How much do they cost?**

The parish, school or agency will pay for the clearances for volunteers. Employees will pay for their own clearances. The two clearances, the *Pennsylvania State Police Criminal Record Check* and the *Pennsylvania Child Abuse History Clearance*, are \$10.00 each. The *Criminal Record Check* must be filed first, and a copy of that **processed** form must be attached to the *Pennsylvania Child Abuse History Clearance* when it is filed.

**Do my daughter and her friend need these background checks? They're both 19 years old. They do the Children's Liturgy of the Word during the 9:30 a.m. Sunday morning liturgy and are only with the children for twenty minutes.**

Yes. The two young ladies are adults according to the law. They will be spending enough time with the children to get to know them and build a relationship with them.

**Do adults working in a Vacation Bible School program need to get clearances?**

The answer is yes if the adults will be working in an unsupervised situation with the children. If the adults will be supervised and not left alone with children, their names should be listed on the *Occasional Volunteers List* which is kept by the parish. These adults should be supervised by a person who is in compliance with all diocesan mandates.

**Are new employees and volunteers from other parishes required to apply for new background checks if they've already had them done?**

Employees and volunteers who are new to your parish must provide you with new clearances. However, a volunteer may present a new parish with copies of clearances from a place of employment if he/she has not changed his/her employment with the organization for which the clearances were obtained.

**How long does a parish/school need to keep child protection records?**

Child Protection records should be kept indefinitely in a secure file. Child abuse cases often come to light 10-15 years after the abuse has occurred. Keeping records is good stewardship and provides investigators with information.

**If the State Police Criminal Record check is returned with a "no record" result, could there be a record of child abuse history in the PA Dept of Public Welfare's records?**

Yes. The State Police lists only cases that are criminally charged, or *founded* cases of child abuse. *Indicated cases* (discovered through physical evidence, admission, etc.) and not charged criminally will not show up in State Police records, but will show up in the Public Welfare records. The majority of cases of child abuse are *indicated*, so it is essential to do both clearances.

**If the State Police Criminal Record check is returned with the result that a person does have a record, does that mean the person cannot work with children?**

Not necessarily. A person could have a record with the State Police for crimes other than child abuse, such as shoplifting, that would not prohibit them from working with children. This is why it is necessary to submit the Child Abuse History Clearance to determine if the record is in fact for child abuse. Of course, depending on the nature of the crime, pastoral discretion should be exercised in allowing persons with criminal records to work with children.

**Can the Safe Environment inservice for adults working with children be done one-on-one?**

Yes. It's not always possible, nor time effective, to conduct "group" inservices for one or for a small number of people. A diocesan-trained facilitator may conduct a one-on-one session with an adult, being sure that the person watches the video *Creating a Safe Environment* and receives all information that is contained in the session lesson plan.

## Activities off school/church/agency premises

**When do I need to have the permission of a child's parents? Do both parents need to give their permission? What if the parents are separated?**

There are two situations where a child's (under the age of 18) parent's permission is required. The first involves any trip off of church/school/agency property.