Diocese of Erie - Office for the Protection of Children and Youth (OPCY)

Parish Children and Youth Safe Environment Training Instructions

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, legal guardians, civil authorities, educators, and community organizations to provide education and training for minors, parents, ministers, employees, volunteers, and others about ways to sustain and foster a safe environment for minors. (Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People Article 12)

ALL children and youth enrolled in parish programs including youth ministry and homeschool formation in the Diocese of Erie will receive age-appropriate safe environment training on an annual basis. *(Bishop's Decree 2020.3.23; Policy Section III, B, #2)*

Process to complete Safe Environment Training

Safe environment training **MUST** be offered on-site, this includes the Edge program, Purpose confirmation program, any post confirmation programs, and youth ministry programs where no other formation program exist except youth ministry. Training children by solely sending the *Home Training Packet* to their homes is **NOT PERMITTED.** All forms, letters, records, list of diocesan approved methods, etc., can be found at www.eriercd.org, Protection of Children, Safe Environment Training and in the *MyDioErie* section under Protection of Children and Youth Forms.

A. On-site Programs:

1. Decide the training method. **NOTE: The training methods for the Diocese of Erie are promulgated** *(Decree is available on the website).* Training done in public schools is not acceptable.

   Show an age-appropriate video from the approved streaming list or approved DVD list. The OPCY office will provide online video links.
   OR
   Have an approved agency present the training. Agencies do not charge for their services. However, it would be much appreciated by the agency if the parish is able to make a small donation to cover the cost of their handout materials and travel. ***NOTE to Parishes in Erie County: due to staffing, the Crime Victim Center of Erie County may NOT BE able to provide services to parishes in Erie County.*** *Parishes in Erie County should use online links or DVDs.*

2. Decide the date(s) the training will occur. **Email the scheduled date(s) and method of training to the OPCY before October 15th each year.**

3. Schedule the agency by calling the agency directly **or** contact the OPCY for a list of online video links for streaming or reserve DVDs by emailing the OPCY with the DVD(s) name and number along with the date of the training. Titles of available DVDs are on the website.

4. Notify parents/legal guardians that Safe Environment training will be conducted. The notice should include instructions on how to opt their child out of the training for those parents/legal guardians who do not want their child to participate in the program. This notification of training can be placed on the registration form, in a bulletin announcement or letter. Sample notifications can be found in MyDioErie, under Everyone - Protection of Youth: The Right to Opt-out of Training:
   https://www.eriercd.org/Protection-of-Children-and-Youth-Forms.html

   The Safe Environment Training for Youth Acknowledgement Form is not to be used to inform the parents/legal guardians of the training. This form is sent *after* the training to note absence or opt-out.

5. On the day of the training**:**
   - Begin by using the appropriate lesson outline and prayer service found on the Protection of Children webpage.

   - Show the video/DVD
     OR the Agency presents training.

   - Complete the Safe Environment Training Record with the date of training, method used, Presenter, and youth present/absent.

6. After the Training:
   Send the diocesan provided letter, age-appropriate Home Training Packet and Acknowledgement Form to parent/legal guardian of any child who was absent or opted-out of the training. Ask the parent/legal guardian to return the completed Acknowledgement Form to the parish. ***Copies of the Acknowledgement Form listing "opt-out" as the reason must be submitted with the Annual Parish Report for Child Protection Compliance.***

B. Homeschool Formation Programs:

Youth in homeschool formation programs are excused from on-site training. Parish Leader ***must*** contact the Child Protection office for online video links. Parent letter, Acknowledgement Form and Training Record for Homeschooled Youth can be found on the Protection of Children webpage.

Documentation of Safe Environment Training

The parish must keep documentation to show that the parish was not negligent in providing every child with safe environment training, as evidenced by one of the following:

- Record of attendance at Safe Environment Training
  OR
  If the youth was absent, a record of the date the Home Training Packet was sent to the parent/legal guardian, the date the Acknowledgement Form was returned, or notation the form was not returned.

- For homeschooled youth: Notation of date that information was sent to the parent/legal guardian and the date of the returned, signed Acknowledgement Form.

The completed Training Record and Acknowledgement forms are confidential files and must be kept on file at the parish indefinitely. Documentation of the number trained, the number of parents/legal guardians who received information and number of forms returned will be reported on the *Annual Parish Report for Child Protection Compliance.*

The *OPCY Parish Safe Environment Training Record* is an **OPTIONAL** form. If the **same information** can more easily be generated using Ministry Platform or another software program, that is acceptable. The format of the form is not critical if the necessary documentation can be produced, and information submitted on the *Annual Parish Report for Child Protection Compliance*.