



Children and Youth Safe Environment Training Instructions for Parish Programs (includes youth in home-based programs or homeschooled)

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, 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, Article 12)

ALL children and youth enrolled in Parish Formation Programs in the Diocese of Erie are required to receive safe environment training in an age-appropriate manner on an annual basis. (*Bishop’s Decree 3.23.2020; Policy Section III, B, #2*)

Rationale for annual Safe Environment training

Teaching skills and strategies so children and youth can protect themselves is a critical task and one that necessitates awareness of proven educational techniques. It is a well-known fact that repetition improves learning. There is evidence that learning usually proceeds gradually. There is also evidence to suggest that if children and youth are presented with age-appropriate information regarding safe environment and personal protection; they become more comfortable discussing such issues. Some are even proud of knowing the material offered in our programs. Comfort and pride help empower children to protect themselves and/or report incidences of abuse.

Process to complete the Safe Environment training

Safe Environment training programs **MUST** be offered on-site, this includes Edge programs. Training all children by solely sending the *Home Training Packet* to their homes is **NOT PERMITTED**.

On-site Formation Programs:

1. Decide the method for training. **NOTE: The training methods for the Diocese of Erie are promulgated** (*see Decree on OPCY website*).

Show approved DVDs (a list of DVDs is available on the Protection of Children webpage under Safe Environment Training)

OR

Have an approved county agency present the training (List of approved agencies is available on the Protection of Children webpage under Safe Environment Training). *Even though these agencies do not charge for their services, 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 parish formation programs in Erie County. Parishes in Erie County should use DVDs to accomplish the training.

2. Decide the dates for training. **Email the scheduled dates and method of training (by **October 15th** of each formation year to childprotection@eriercd.org**
3. Schedule the agency by calling the agency directly **or** reserve DVDs through the Office for the Protection of Children and Youth by emailing the number and name of the DVD(s) and the date of the training to childprotection@eriercd.org
4. Advise all parents/guardians that Safe Environment training will be conducted sometime during the year. Advise parents/guardians who do not want their child to participate in the program to notify the parish in writing, so the child may be excused from the training presentation. This notification of training can be done on the registration form, bulletin announcement or letter. **The Option Form is not to be used to inform the parents/guardians of the training.** The Option Form is sent after the training when a student is absent, or the parents/guardians refused the training.

NOTE: Sample notifications can be found in MyDioErie, #1. Everyone, Protection of Youth: The Right to Refuse Training. <https://www.eriercd.org/Protection-of-Children-and-Youth-Forms.html>

On the day of the training:

1. Begin by using the age-appropriate diocesan lesson outline and prayer service, which can be found on the Protection of Children webpage under Safe Environment Training.
2. Show the diocesan approved DVD using the Facilitators guide provided with the DVD OR the Agency presents training
3. Record date of training, DVD/agency used, Presenter, and youth present/absent on the OPCY Safe Environment Training Record

After the Training:

1. Send the appropriate Home Training Packet along with the Option Form to parent(s) or guardian(s) of any child who was absent or whose parent(s)/guardian(s) refused the child's participation in the training. Ask parent(s)/guardian(s) to return the completed option form to the parish. Including a self-addressed, stamped envelope may facilitate the return of the Option Form.

1.1. Copies of the Option Form listing "refusal" as the reason must be returned with the Annual Parish Report for Child Protection Compliance.

2. The Training Record, form letter, Home Training Packet and the Option Form can be found on the Protection of Children webpage under Safe Environment Training.

Religious Education/Formation in a Home-based Model:

Youth in Home-based/homeschooled programs are excused from on-site training. Leader *must* contact the Child Protection office for online video links. Form letter, Option Forms and Training Record can be found on the Protection of Children webpage.

The completed forms must be kept on file at the parish indefinitely. Documentation of the numbers of parents/guardians who received information and returned forms must be submitted on the *Annual Parish Report for Child Protection Compliance*.

Safe Environment training completed through a public school system:

Training for safe environment/personal protection done in a public school is acceptable provided that the *public school is using a diocesan approved agency*. Documentation from the public school or approved agency that performed the training must be provided to the parish and must include the name of the school, school district, date, children present for the training and presenter. Copies of this documentation must be kept on file as record of child safe environment training. ***If the public school will not release the information, then parish youth must be trained through the parish program.***

If a child was absent, age appropriate, training packets and option forms must be mailed to the parents/guardians of children who were absent on the day of the public school's safe environment training.

Documentation of Safe Environment Training

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

1. Record of attendance at Safe Environment Training (parish or public-school)
OR
2. If the youth was absent, a record of the date that the Home Training Packet was sent to the parents/guardians, date the signed Option Form was returned, or notation that the form was not returned.
OR
3. Notation of date that information was mailed to parents/guardians of children in home-based programs or homeschooled and the returned, signed *Record of Safe Environment Training for Home-based or Homeschooled Religious Education*.

The *OPCY Safe Environment Training Record –Parish Program* is an **OPTIONAL** form. If the **same information** can more easily be generated using Ministry Platform or another computer 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*. These forms or records are to be kept on-site at the parish. ***All documentation is to be kept confidentially and indefinitely.***

Parishes will be required to provide the following information on the *Annual Parish Report for Child Protection Compliance*:

1. Total number of youths enrolled in any grade, Preschool - Grade 12 with Preschool counted separately
2. Number of youth receiving training on-site/through public school
3. Number of youth absent/held out and trained by parents/guardians
4. Number whose parents/guardians refused safe environment training

5. Number of youths trained by parents/guardians in home-based or homeschooled programs

Information and forms necessary for Safe Environment training compliance can be found online in MyDioErie – Protection of Children and on the Protection of Children and Youth webpage of the diocesan website under Safe Environment Training.

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