



Instructions to carry out the Safe Environment Training of Youth who attend Religious Education

(includes those youth in homebased programs/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, 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 youth attending Religious Education, Preschool – Grade 12, in the Diocese of Erie are required to be safe environment trained in an age appropriate manner annually. This training is to be completed by the end of March each year. (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 also evidence that learning usually proceeds gradually. For instance, a cardinal rule of thumb in advertising is that potential customers usually need to see the name of a product seven times or more before they're motivated enough to even think about making a purchase.

There is 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 carry out the Safe Environment Training

Safe Environment Training programs **MUST** be offered on-site; training all children by solely sending the *Home Training Packet* to their homes is **NOT PERMITTED**. Home-based/homeschooled programs are exempt from on-site training and *must* send the Home Training Packet and Record of Training for Home-based Religious Education.

The mandate to train all youth can be achieved in one of two ways. Either through the Religious Education program or through the public school. The process to complete the training in each of the approved ways is listed below.

Religious Education Program

1. Decide the method for training. You may use the approved DVD's (listed on the Child Protection webpage under Safe Environment Programs)

OR

Have the approved PCAR agency in your county present the training (List of approved PCAR agencies is on the Child Protection webpage under Safe Environment Programs). Even though these agencies do not charge for their services, *it would be appropriate and much appreciated by the agency if parish programs are able to make a small donation to cover the cost of their handout materials and travel.*

If you are in Erie County, The Crime Victim Center of Erie County is NOT able to provide their services to the Religious Education programs in Erie County with their current staffing (for parishes in Erie County training will be accomplished by use of the approved DVDs from the Diocesan Media Resource Library).

2. Decide your dates for training.
Email the scheduled Safe Environment training dates and method of training (DVD's or agency presentation) for Religious Education children & youth by October 15th of each catechetical year to childprotection@eriercd.org
3. Schedule the PCAR agency or reserve your DVD's through the Office for the Protection of Children and Youth at childprotection@eriercd.org
4. Advise all parents that Safe Environment training will be conducted sometime during the year. Advise parents who do not want their child to participate in the program to notify the Religious Education office in writing, so the child may be excused from the group the day the training is presented. This notification of training can be done on the registration form, bulletin announcement or letter.

Sample notifications that can be added to your registration forms or placed in the bulletin can be found in My DioErie section of the diocesan website under Parents 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
Agency presents training
3. Record date of Training, DVD/agency used, Presenter, and youth absence on the Student In-service Record

After the Training:

1. The parent(s)/guardian(s) of any child who is absent or whose parent(s)/guardians(s) have refused the child's participation in the on-site training must receive the age appropriate diocesan Home Training Packet along with the Option Form. Ask parent(s)/guardian(s) to return the completed option form to the parish Religious Education Office (including a self-addressed, stamped envelope will facilitate the return of the 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 Student Inservice Record, Form letter, Home Training Packets and the Option Form can be found on the Child Protection webpage under Safe Environment Training.

Religious Education in a Home-Based Model

If parish Religious Education is provided using a home-based/homeschool model, the age appropriate *Home Training Packet(s)* and the *Record of Inservicing for Home Based Religious Education* must be mailed annually to the homes of any youth in grades K-12 for safe environment inservicing by the parents. The completed forms must be kept on file at the parish. Documentation of the numbers of parents who received information and returned forms must be submitted on the *Annual Parish Report for Child Protection Compliance* as youth not trained.

Training completed through the Public School

Training for safe environment/personal protection in the child's public school is acceptable. Documentation from the public school or county 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 will 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 Religious Education Program.***

If a child was absent age appropriate training packets and option forms must be mailed to the parents of children who were absent on the day of the 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 training information was given to parents and the returned, signed *Option Form*.
OR
3. Notation of date that information was mailed to parents of children in home-based programs and the returned, signed *Record of Safe Environment Training for Home Based Religious Education*.

The *Safe Environment In-service Record – Religious Education* is an **OPTIONAL** form to be used if desired. If the **same information** can more easily be generated using PDS or another computer program, that is acceptable. As long as the necessary documentation can be produced, and information submitted on the *Annual Parish Report for Child Protection Compliance*, the format of the form is not critical. These forms or records are to be kept on-site at the parish and not sent to the diocese. ***All documentation is to be kept confidentially and indefinitely.***

Parishes will be required to provide safe environment training information on the *Annual Parish Report for Child Protection Compliance*, in the spring of each year.

That information will include:

1. Total number of Religious Education youth enrolled in any grade, Kindergarten - Grade 12
(Preschool is counted separately)
2. Number of youth receiving training on-site/through public school.
3. Number of youth absent/held out on-site and trained by parents.
4. Number whose parents refused safe environment training
5. Number of youth trained by parents in home-based programs (listed as number not trained by parish or public school)

Information and forms needed for Safe Environment Training compliance can be found online in My DioErie – Protection of Children or and at the Protection of Children webpage of the diocesan website. From the left hand side of the page, click on Safe Environment Training.