



# *Safe Environment Audit Preparation Checklist*

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This listing is a guide to help ensure that your parish/school is completing all required tasks and actions relative to the Safe Environment protocol for the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston. It also is designed to serve as a guide to help you prepare for an on-site audit.

The people who should be able to answer/address these questions at the parish or school are: the priest, the principal, and the local level Safe Environment coordinator.

The Safe Environment policy applies to all employees and volunteers who work with or around children. The language utilized may be: “with or around children;” “directly or indirectly with children;” “have access to children;” or “directly with children or where children are present when performing one’s duties.” All of these variations, or similar variations, carry the same meaning.

1. Do you have a local level Safe Environment coordinator designated by the priest and/or principal for your parish/school? Do you know who that is? Do you have that person’s contact information readily available? Have you provided that person’s name and contact information to the Office of Safe Environment at the Chancery?

**Every parish/school must have a local level Safe Environment coordinator designated. The priest/principal is responsible for designating this person. The local level Safe Environment coordinator must have access to the VIRTUS system with local administrator rights. One person may fulfill this role or it may be a job share between two people. In addition, priests and principals are welcome to have access to the locations they oversee so that they can monitor and ensure compliance is being achieved. Please ensure that you provide the name and contact information for your local level Coordinator to the Office of Safe Environment at the Chancery.**

2. Do you know where to find the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston’s Sex Abuse Policy? If someone asks to see the Policy, do you know where to direct the person? Do you know how to access and distribute the Policy if someone asks for a copy?

**The DWC’s Sex Abuse Policy is housed on the DWC web site. Go to [www.dwc.org](http://www.dwc.org), then Diocese, then Offices, then Safe Environment, then Download Files and Forms. Or once you get to the Safe Environment section of the web site, you may also click directly on “Diocesan Policy.” The policy can be downloaded and printed or downloaded and emailed to anyone who requests it. You may also request hard copy Sex Abuse Policy booklets from the Office of Safe Environment. Many DWC schools/parishes also provide a link to the policy at the bottom of the home pages on their web sites. Please take a moment to determine if your school or parish links to the policy through your web site. If it does not, please consider doing so.**

3. Do you know where to find the Code of Conduct for employees and volunteers who work with or around children? Do you make the Code of Conduct available and clear to everyone who works and volunteers at your parish or school?

**The Code of Conduct is part of the Diocese's Sex Abuse Policy and can be found in the back of the Sex Abuse Policy Booklet. It also is available online on the DWC web site. Go to [www.dwc.org](http://www.dwc.org), then Diocese, then Offices, then Safe Environment, then Download Files and Forms. The Code of Conduct is there and you may also click on it via the Code of Conduct link down the left side of the page. Please periodically remind your employees and volunteers of the Code of Conduct and where to find it in a manner that is easy and widely accessible, for example, in the parish bulletin or in the school newsletter. As of July 2022, all employees and volunteers have the ability to electronically acknowledge the Code of Conduct (as well as the Policy form and the Reporting Statute) as part of the Safe Environment process through the VIRTUS system.**

4. Do you display the DWC's most current reporting poster in multiple common, high-traffic areas around your parish and/or school?

**The most up to date poster is always distributed via email to all parishes and schools in a PDF format prior to the start of the school year. Please print the poster (it is designed to print on 8.5 x 11 plain paper) and display it throughout your parishes and schools in common, high traffic areas, such as the main office, main hallways, vestibule bulletin boards, parish hall, rest rooms, etc. The poster is sent via the [dwc.org](http://dwc.org) email addresses for all parishes and schools. Please check your parish or school's [dwc.org](http://dwc.org) email address as assigned by the IT Department at the Chancery.**

5. Do you include information on how to report abuse in your parish bulletin on a regular basis (preferably weekly)? If you are a school, do you include reporting information in newsletters or do you remind parents/guardians of how to report on a regular basis? If you provide this information via means other than the parish bulletin or school newsletter, do you document how and when it was provided?

**The Diocese encourages reporting to civil authorities first and foremost if a crime has been committed. Here is the basic language that you should be including in your weekly parish bulletin, school newsletter, or any other means of communication that you distribute:**

**"The Diocese encourages reporting to civil authorities first and foremost if a crime has been committed. To report an incidence of suspected child sexual abuse, please contact your local law enforcement agency, or you may confidentially contact WV Child Protective Services at 800.352.6513. In addition to civil authorities, you may also report suspected cases of sexual abuse by personnel or volunteers of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston to the Diocese, by contacting one of the Bishop's designees**

at 888.434.6237 or 304.233.0880: Mr. Bryan Minor, ext. 263; Mr. Tim Bishop, ext. 353; Fr. Dennis Schuelkens, ext. 270 or call the Office of Safe Environment at 304.230.1504. You may also visit [www.dwc.org](http://www.dwc.org), under “Accountability” for additional reporting mechanisms.”

**Numbers 6-10 and 18 are the heart of Safe Environment audits and will be the most important aspect auditors will be looking at:**

6. Are all employees and volunteers at your parish or school current and compliant with the Safe Environment protocol (completion of VIRTUS awareness training, completion of a current background check, completion of/acknowledgement of documents)?

**Every employee and volunteer who works directly or indirectly with children must be compliant with the Safe Environment protocol of background check, completion of VIRTUS awareness training, and completion of/acknowledgement of documents. This is not negotiable. If your location is not compliant, the Office of Safe Environment can assist you in achieving and documenting compliance in a manner that is expeditious and respectful of your resources.**

7. Are you ensuring background checks are run every three years on your employees and volunteers?

**Updated background checks are required every three years for all employees and volunteers who work directly or indirectly with children. This is not negotiable. If your location is not compliant, the Office of Safe Environment can assist you in achieving and documenting compliance in a manner that is expeditious and respectful of your resources.**

8. Are you following up on background checks to ensure there are no findings or if there are findings, to see what those are and how they might impact interaction with children and/or vulnerable adults?

**After a background check has been submitted and the results have been returned, you need to check to ensure that there were no findings and the person is cleared to work or volunteer. A sex abuse-related finding automatically disqualifies a person to work or volunteer. Any other findings are subject to review by the priest/principal and/or Human Resources. Please ensure that you are following up on your background checks to ensure that results are reviewed and cleared in a timely fashion.**

9. Is Safe Environment compliance for all employees and volunteers documented in the VIRTUS software platform?

**Every employee and volunteer who works directly or indirectly with children must be compliant with the Safe Environment protocol of background check, completion of VIRTUS awareness training, and completion of/acknowledgement of**

**documents. This is not negotiable. Compliance must be documented in the VIRTUS system. Lack of documentation of compliance is an audit finding.**

10. Are you delivering the Teaching Safety lessons to grades K-12 in your PSR program or your religious education program if you are a Catholic school in accordance with the timeline and lesson numbers as set forth each year by the Office of Safe Environment?

**The Diocese requires an awareness training program for children in grades K-12 in Catholic schools and in parish schools of religion. The program is called VIRTUS Teaching Safety. Two lessons are taught each year: one by the end of October and the other by the end of the school year. If you teach both lessons together they should both be taught by the end of October. Every year, prior to the start of the school year, the Office of Safe Environment sends out an email listing which lessons are scheduled for the current year. The resource materials and lessons themselves are housed under the Educator's Tab within VIRTUS. Whoever is in charge of teaching the lessons should have the Educator's Tab assigned to their VIRTUS account. Or, your local level Safe Environment coordinator may have access to the Educator's Tab as well.**

11. Are you providing the Teaching Safety opt out letter to all parents/guardians two weeks in advance of the lesson being taught?

**All parents/guardians must be given the option to opt out of having their children participate in the lessons. A template Opt-Out Letter is housed under the Educator's Tab within VIRTUS. Whoever is in charge of teaching the lessons should have the Educator's Tab assigned to their VIRTUS account. Or, your local level Safe Environment coordinator may have access to the Educator's Tab as well. The Opt Out letter template is housed under the Educator's Tab with the other Teaching Safety resources and lessons.**

12. Are you keeping the signed Teaching Safety opt out letters on file?

**Any parent or guardian who opts their child(ren) out of the lessons must return the signed Opt-Out Letter and you must keep it on file at your location.**

13. Are you offering the Teaching Safety lesson materials to parents/guardians who opt out so that they may teach the lesson(s) themselves at home if they prefer? Are you keeping documentation that the materials were offered to those who opted out?

**You may customize the Opt Out Letter to include language that states, "All parents/guardians who opt out their child(ren) from the Teaching Safety lessons are welcome to obtain the lessons from the school/parish and teach them at home. Please let us know if you would like for us to provide copies of the lessons for you to teach at home. Also, all parents/guardians are welcome to view the lessons in advance of their delivery. Please let us know if you would like to see what we will be teaching in advance, and we can arrange for you to review the lessons." If you include this**

**paragraph in your opt out letter and then keep the signed opt out letters on file, this will constitute documentation that you offered.**

14. Are you communicating to parents/guardians that they have the right to see any Teaching Safety materials in advance of the lesson(s) being taught? Are you keeping documentation that this was offered?

**You may customize the Opt Out Letter to include language that states, “All parents/guardians who opt out their child(ren) from the Teaching Safety lessons are welcome to obtain the lessons from the school/parish and teach them at home. Please let us know if you would like for us to provide copies of the lessons for you to teach at home. Also, all parents/guardians are welcome to view the lessons in advance of their delivery. Please let us know if you would like to see what we will be teaching in advance, and we can arrange for you to review the lessons.” If you include this paragraph in your opt out letter and then keep the signed opt out letters on file, this will constitute documentation that you offered.**

15. Once a Teaching Safety lesson is taught, are you recording/documenting the information in the VIRTUS software platform for your parish/school?

**You must track: which lessons you taught, where, when, and how many students were taught. You also must track how many students opted out as well as how many students did not opt out and did not participate. You must record this information under the Record Training link under the Educator’s Tab in the VIRTUS system, and you will be required to report it on the yearly data collection audit verification form that is sent from and returned to the Office of Safe Environment at the Chancery.**

16. Does your parish or school ensure that all visiting or long-term substitutes (clergy, teachers, training providers, etc.) comply with Safe Environment prior to commencing activities?

**Every employee and volunteer who works directly or indirectly with children must be compliant with the Safe Environment protocol of background check, completion of VIRTUS awareness training, and completion of/acknowledgement of documents. This is not negotiable. If your location is not compliant, the Office of Safe Environment can assist you in achieving and documenting compliance in a manner that is expeditious and respectful of your resources. Compliance extends to regular volunteers who may be visiting from other dioceses, public or private entities, substitute teachers, or visiting clergy, as examples.**

17. Are you reporting issues or concerns to the appropriate civil authorities in accordance with West Virginia law? Do you document that you have reported when reporting is required? Are you also informing the Office of Safe Environment at the Chancery when adverse events occur?

The Diocese encourages reporting to civil authorities first and foremost if a crime has been committed. The state of West Virginia has a 24-hour reporting requirement. Please also notify the Office of Safe Environment once you have reported an adverse event or concern. You may also call Safe Environment if you are unsure what to do and we can help guide you through the process. Documentation may consist of emails, written reports, copies of police reports, texts, handwritten or typed notes/call logs, etc.

18. Are you regularly checking the VIRTUS platform to ensure that no employees or volunteers are falling through the cracks regarding achieving and maintaining Safe Environment compliance?

**Safe Environment compliance is an ongoing process. All parishes/schools should regularly check the VIRTUS system to ensure that new employees and volunteers are added and those who have moved on are end-dated from your location. All parishes/schools should be regularly checking the VIRTUS system to ensure that background checks are being completed every three years. Depending on the number of volunteers and employees at your location, you may check weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, or quarterly. In addition, schools should check VIRTUS prior to the start of every sports season; the start of every school year; and at the end of every school year, in addition to your weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, or quarterly checks. Parishes and schools should check VIRTUS prior to any special events your parish or school is sponsoring or hosting. Check regularly! This is an ongoing process that requires regular attention to detail.**

19. Are you regularly checking the dwc.org email address your parish/school was assigned by the IT department at the Chancery? Do you know what your location's dwc.org email address is? Do you know the password? Do you know who has access to the dwc.org email address? Is there anyone assigned to regularly check this email account?

**Each parish and school has been assigned its own dwc.org email address by the IT Department at the Chancery. Please ensure that you know your location's dwc.org email address, the password, and the person/people responsible for checking it. Please ensure that you check your dwc.org email daily or at least weekly. This is the primary email the Chancery uses to communicate with parishes/schools and where we send Safe Environment communications.**

The VIRTUS system has a robust reporting requirement. We are able to print various compliance reports for each parish/school. Part of the on-site audit process will involve the Office of Safe Environment providing compliance reports for your location and then those reports being cross-checked against payroll; newsletters; weekly parish bulletins; social media; youth group; athletic department records for coaches; and/or any other mechanism that identifies employees or volunteers of your parish/school.

**Some other examples of how questions may be asked during an audit:**

- What is the purpose of Safe Environment?
- Explain the Diocese's Safe Environment policy/program. What all does it entail? What are your responsibilities?
- How do you keep Safe Environment records?
- How often are background checks done? Who does them? How do you keep track of them?
- Who determines if a person is suitable for working or volunteering here?
- Do you have a code of conduct for working with or supervising minors? What are some of the guidelines?
- What is the Diocese's policy on reporting abuse? Where can you find this information?
- Demonstrate that your parish/school promotes reporting abuse.
- Explain how your parish/school/diocese handles disclosures of sex abuse.
- Explain the communications process for disclosures/allegations of sex abuse.
- Do you have any examples of communications from disclosures/allegations?
- How does the Diocese communicate with you when a disclosure occurs?
- How does the Diocese collect your Safe Environment data for audit each year?