



Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston
Office of Safe Environment

SAFE ENVIRONMENT PROGRAM HANDBOOK

SCHOOLS

August 2023

SAFE ENVIRONMENT MANDATES

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) requires that all Dioceses/Eparchies have in place a Safe Environment Program for the protection of children and young people. The ***Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*** was adopted by the USCCB in June 2002 as a response to sexual abuse of minors by Catholic priests and deacons. The Charter is the basis for the Safe Environment program in every Diocese in the United States. The USCCB established an Office of Child and Youth Protection at the national level to oversee the application of the Charter's principles and to create the means for accountability for ensuring implementation of standards at the diocesan and parish/school levels.

The Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston has a full-time Office of Safe Environment at the Chancery to help ensure the Diocese's commitment to its children and young people and compliance with the Diocese's Safe Environment Policy. In addition, at the local level, each parish, school, or organization appoints a local level coordinator to help carry out the Safe Environment process.

PLEASE NOTE: The Safe Environment process is not negotiable and every aspect of it must be carried out in full, to include use of the software to document and track compliance for employees and volunteers as well as completion of continuing education for students and designated employees.

REPORTING ABUSE

In the event that you or anyone at your school receives a disclosure or suspects abuse, the Diocese encourages reporting first and foremost to civil authorities in accordance with West Virginia law, then to Diocesan authorities, specifically the Office of Safe Environment.

West Virginia law requires reporting to civil authorities (DHHR/CPS or law enforcement) within 24 hours. School and clergy personnel are mandated reporters according to West Virginia law. Reporting to your supervisor does NOT absolve you of the mandated reporting requirement to civil authorities. You MUST report to civil authorities.

To report suspected cases of sexual abuse please contact your local law enforcement agency or call the West Virginia Adult/Child Abuse Hotline: 1.800.352.6513.

To report suspected cases of sexual abuse of children by personnel or volunteers of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston to the Diocese, please contact the Office of Safe Environment at 304.230.1504.

REPORTING POSTERS

Please display the Diocese's Protecting God's Children posters for reporting in common areas throughout your school. If you need posters, please call or email the Office of

Safe Environment. Posters are emailed to parishes and schools and parishes and schools print them as needed. They are emailed in PDF format and print on 8.5 x 11 plain paper.

LOCAL LEVEL COORDINATORS FOR PARISHES AND SCHOOLS

Each parish and school must have a person designated as the local level Safe Environment coordinator for the location. VIRTUS is the awareness training provider and the platform for documenting Safe Environment compliance for the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston. The local level Safe Environment coordinator will access VIRTUS through his or her account and will manage the Safe Environment process by logging in with a userID and password. The school must provide the name of the local level Safe Environment coordinator to the Office of Safe Environment at the Chancery. In turn, that designee's VIRTUS account will be configured with privileges to manage the VIRTUS platform for the school. Please call the Office of Safe Environment if your local level coordinator does not have access to the VIRTUS system.

The local level Safe Environment coordinator for a school is responsible for:

- Communicating with the principal, teachers, various coaches, volunteers, clergy, those who oversee extra-curricular activities, and anyone else engaged in programs and activities related to the school to determine, formulate, and keep current a list of employees and volunteers in the various departments and activities relative to the school
- Ensuring that the Safe Environment process for compliance is executed for all employees and volunteers
- Monitoring and ensuring that regular background checks are completed for all employees and volunteers **(the diocese requires background checks of employees and volunteers every three (3) years)**
- Ensuring that compliance with the Safe Environment protocol is documented in the designated software platform(s) – for the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, that platform is VIRTUS.
- Maintaining a current compliance list of employees and volunteers at any given time within the designated software platform; inactivating accounts for anyone who has moved on from working or volunteering
- Checking/monitoring/updating the VIRTUS queue for your school weekly, monthly, or quarterly depending on the size of your school and the number of volunteers and employees
- Working with the principal to complete the yearly data collection audit form and to participate in on-site audits every year
- Communicating with the Office of Safe Environment at the Chancery when Safe Environment issues or questions arise

The local level Safe Environment coordinator for each school is appointed by the principal and the priest. Generally, one employee fulfills the duties of local level Safe Environment coordinator, but sometimes two employees, or an employee and a volunteer, share the duties. The Diocese supports the circumstance that works best for

the school. The Office of Safe Environment maintains a list of local level Safe Environment coordinators and their contact information, so please notify Safe Environment if your local level Safe Environment coordinator changes. Again, the VIRTUS accounts for local level coordinators have a special configuration with access to the platform specifically for management of the Safe Environment process. It is imperative that each school has a local level Safe Environment coordinator designated and that person's information is on file at the Office of Safe Environment at the Chancery.

The Office of Safe Environment provides training, resources, and support for those who are designated as local level Safe Environment coordinators. Please contact the Office of Safe Environment for training, resources, and questions.

THE THREE COMPONENTS OF SAFE ENVIRONMENT FOR ADULTS

The Safe Environment Program for the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston consists of the following components:

- ✓ Background Checks for every employee and volunteer
- ✓ Receipt and Review: Policy Relating to Sexual Abuse of Children and related acknowledgements
- ✓ Awareness training for adults (VIRTUS online or live training)

All three components (Background Checks, Policy Relating to Sexual Abuse of Children, and Awareness Training for Adults – VIRTUS) are **mandated** by the Charter and the Diocese for **persons seeking employment or seeking to volunteer, directly or indirectly with children**, within the Diocese of Wheeling–Charleston and any entity that falls under the Diocese.

- An **employee** is defined as a person who performs regular work or service and is paid by the Diocese or a Diocesan-entity (parish, school, pastoral center, etc.)
- A **volunteer** is a person who performs a regular service at no charge to the Diocese or Diocesan-entity.

The Safe Environment process applies to any employees or volunteers who work directly or indirectly with children/minors. A minor is considered anyone under the age of 18. The Safe Environment process also is designed to protect those who are 18 years of age but still enrolled in high school, most likely during their senior year. Although they are technically adults because of their age, any adverse events of which an 18 year old is the victim will be reported to law enforcement and reported in accordance with the Charter as well.

A person is considered in compliance with the Safe Environment Policy upon successful completion of all three components.

In order to maintain Safe Environment compliance, background checks are repeated every three (3) years for all employees and volunteers.

The background check includes a nationwide sex offender search. All employees and volunteers are required to review the Policy Relating to Sexual Abuse of Children so that they clearly know the Diocese's stance on this issue. And lastly, the online or live training is intended to raise awareness regarding sex abuse prevention and reporting.

The Safe Environment process is applied to all priests, deacons, and seminarians, and they also are required to undergo additional awareness training above and beyond the initial VIRTUS module. **In addition, priests, deacons, and Catholic school employees also are required to be fingerprinted regularly.** Please contact the Office of Safe Environment for information regarding fingerprinting.

SAFE ENVIRONMENT AWARENESS TRAINING FOR CHILDREN

In addition to the awareness training for adults, the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston also offers a VIRTUS awareness program for children called **Teaching Safety and Boundaries**. The program for children has been implemented since the fall of 2005 in the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston and is designed to give children information (appropriate for their age levels) and skills to help recognize acceptable and unacceptable behaviors and how to effectively deal with those behaviors. The program is taught in Catholic schools and as part of Parish Schools of Religion throughout the Diocese.

All lessons and related resource materials for the program for students are housed under the Educator's Tab within VIRTUS. There should always be a person at the school designated with the Educator's Tab in his or her VIRTUS account to access the lessons and resources and document the trainings when they occur. This person can be the principal, the local level Safe Environment coordinator, or a designated teacher of the lessons. Please ensure that you have a person designated to access the materials for your school and contact the Office of Safe Environment if that person needs the Educator's Tab assigned to their VIRTUS account.

Two lessons are taught each year, along with the showing of an age-appropriate introductory DVD.

There are two timelines offered for teaching the yearly lessons and your school should select which option works best for your location:

- Both lessons are taught together no later than the end of October.
- One lesson is taught no later than the end of October, and the other lesson is taught no later than the end of the school year.

Your school will receive an email at the start of each year indicating which particular lesson numbers for all grade levels (K-12) are to be taught for the year.

Recognizing the sensitivity of this subject matter and that some parents prefer to address it directly with their children as opposed to having someone else address it, before a Teaching Safety lesson is taught, parents must be sent the Opt-Out Letter at least two weeks in advance of the lesson(s). The opt-out letter template is also found under the Educator's Tab in the VIRTUS system. You must use the VIRTUS opt-out template that is housed under the Educator's Tab.

Completion of both lessons must be documented in the VIRTUS system. Please see the Documentation of Compliance section below on how to document that the two lessons were taught.

In addition to Teaching Safety and Boundaries lessons, and in conjunction with the Office of Safe Environment, a booklet entitled **Digital Do's and Don'ts** is available for all students in grades 6 – 12 and must be taught each year during the fall term. A lesson on the topics of sexting and bullying must be given utilizing this booklet. This booklet is designed to help educate students regarding West Virginia law and how it applies to their use of cell phones and other electronic devices and the internet. As always, parents are welcome to view this booklet as well.

Please note: parents are always welcome to view the Teaching Safety lessons and Digital Do's and Don'ts in advance. The school may also provide copies of the lessons and booklet to parents, if requested.

DOCUMENTATION OF COMPLIANCE

Your school is responsible for ensuring documentation of Safe Environment compliance.

Safe Environment compliance must be documented for:

- employees and volunteers
- completion of the Teaching Safety lessons

The Diocese utilizes the VIRTUS system for training as well as to achieve and document Safe Environment compliance.

The VIRTUS system is designed for the Safe Environment process to be completed and automatically documented/tracked electronically for adults. However, there may be times when data/information must be manually entered. Please refer to the training videos and user manual as provided by the Chancery for how to update records manually or call the Office of Safe Environment for assistance.

To document the two, yearly Teaching Safety lessons that are required for children, log on to VIRTUS and select the Educator's Tab. Next, select Record Training down the left side of the screen and follow the prompts to document that the lessons were taught. For the Teaching Safety lessons, the school will document: lesson number, training date, time, location, and number participating. Simply follow the prompts and enter the information and save it.

If your local level Safe Environment coordinator or designee for recording the lessons does not have the Educator's Tab to record student awareness training, please contact the Office of Safe Environment. If the designee for recording the lessons is not the same person as the local level Safe Environment coordinator, the local level Safe Environment coordinator must work with the designee at the yearly audit time to ensure that the correct numbers are reported on the annual audit form.

CONTINUING EDUCATION

Principals and teachers are required to complete monthly VIRTUS awareness training bulletins and other modules, workshops, and seminars as assigned as a means of continuing education.

Each month, VIRTUS delivers a bulletin to the VIRTUS account and principals and teachers are required to read and answer the question at the end. In turn, the system digitally tracks completion of each bulletin. This monthly awareness training takes about 5 minutes or less. Please know that the monthly bulletins do not arrive via email. REMINDERS to complete the training will arrive via email, but not the actual training bulletin. You must log on to your VIRTUS account to access the actual training bulletin.

Here's how:

- Go to www.virtusonline.org
- Enter your User ID and Password (upper left corner of the page)
- Click the Training Bulletins box on the home page
- You will see a listing of bulletins
- Click on the bulletin (BLUE link) that says "Not Read"
- Once you answer the question at the end of the bulletin, the system will automatically record your bulletin as completed and will reflect the date of completion.
- If you have several bulletins that say "Not Read," please catch up at your earliest convenience.
- The bulletins do not come via email. You will receive a reminder via email that there is a bulletin ready for your review in your VIRTUS account.

If anyone at the school needs the Training Tab in their VIRTUS account, please contact the Office of Safe Environment.

HOW TO EXECUTE THE SAFE ENVIRONMENT PROCESS

The principal and priest designate a local level Safe Environment coordinator. In some schools the principal is the local level Safe Environment coordinator. In other schools, the principal and priest designate a current school employee as the local level Safe Environment coordinator. Some schools designate two employees or an employee and a volunteer to job share the position. The Diocese supports whichever circumstance works best for your particular school.

The local level Safe Environment coordinator consults with the principal, teachers at all grade levels, sports, clubs, and extracurricular activities to determine who is employed at the school and who is volunteering at the school. It is important to consider all the various day to day operations and activities that occur at the school and who works or volunteers for each. This forms the basis for the school's list of employees and volunteers who are required to comply with Safe Environment.

Once the local level Safe Environment coordinator is in place, that person then becomes the point of contact for Safe Environment for anyone who wants to work or volunteer at the school.

The Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston uses the VIRTUS platform to execute and manage compliance for employees and volunteers.

PLEASE NOTE: IF YOU ARE HIRING A PERSON, YOU MUST GO THROUGH THE DIOCESE'S HUMAN RESOURCES PROTOCOL. PLEASE CONTACT HUMAN RESOURCES AT THE CHANCERY IF YOU ARE HIRING A PERSON.

NO ONE IS PERMITTED TO WORK WITHOUT FIRST COMPLETING A BACKGROUND CHECK AND THE HIRING PROCESS THROUGH THE HUMAN RESOURCES OFFICE AT THE CHANCERY.

A person comes to your parish or school to become an **EMPLOYEE**:

1. Contact the Human Resources Office at the Chancery. Please follow the hiring process protocol as established by the HR Office at the Chancery.
2. HR staff at the Chancery will work with you to conduct a background check FIRST.
3. If the person progresses to the point of hire, the HR onboarding process will be executed. The HR onboarding process includes a mechanism for the employee to create a VIRTUS account, complete VIRTUS awareness training online, and electronically complete/sign/acknowledge all Safe Environment-related forms.
4. Once the person officially becomes an employee, the Office of Safe Environment will enter the person's background check date into the VIRTUS system. Following this initial entry, in three years, it then becomes the responsibility of the school to ensure that the background check is updated when it comes due again. **(All volunteers and employees are background checked every three (3) years.)**
5. After 3 years, updating the background check through ScreeningOne can be accomplished through the employee's VIRTUS account. VIRTUS and ScreeningOne are integrated. The employee logs into his or her VIRTUS and selects the option and follows the prompts to renew his or her background check.
6. It is the responsibility of the local level Safe Environment coordinator at the school to monitor the VIRTUS queue for the school and ensure that all employees and volunteers are up to date on Safe Environment requirements and background check renewals. If you see that a background check is due for renewal but has not yet been updated, it is

the local level Coordinator's responsibility to work with the employee or volunteer to accomplish this requirement.

7. Any questions or concerns should be directed to the HR Office and/or the Office of Safe Environment.

NO ONE IS PERMITTED TO VOLUNTEER WITHOUT FIRST COMPLETING A BACKGROUND CHECK AND THE SAFE ENVIRONMENT PROCESS.

A person comes to your parish or school to become a **VOLUNTEER**:

1. Advise the person that there is a set of Safe Environment requirements that they must meet before they can volunteer. No one is permitted to volunteer until all requirements are successfully satisfied.
2. Provide the person with the HOW TO sheet for registering for a VIRTUS account and completing the requirements online.
3. Advise the person that the process for completing all the requirements will take about 90 minutes and is accomplished online.
4. By following the instructions on the HOW TO form, the person will be able to create a VIRTUS account, complete VIRTUS awareness training online, complete the background check, and electronically complete/sign/acknowledge all Safe Environment-related forms.
5. Once the person officially becomes a volunteer, it is the responsibility of the school to update the background check when it comes due again in three (3) years. **(All volunteers and employees are background checked every three (3) years.)**
6. After 3 years, updating the background check through ScreeningOne can be accomplished through the volunteer's VIRTUS account. VIRTUS and ScreeningOne are integrated. The volunteer logs on to VIRTUS and selects the option and follows the prompts to renew his or her background check.
7. It is the responsibility of the local level Safe Environment coordinator to monitor the VIRTUS queue for the school and ensure that all employees are up to date on Safe Environment requirements and background check renewals. If you see that a background check is due for renewal but has not yet been updated, it is the local level Coordinator's responsibility to work with the employee or volunteer to accomplish this requirement.
8. Any questions or concerns should be directed to the Office of Safe Environment.

What happens if a volunteer does not have a computer or attends a live VIRTUS session as opposed to completing awareness training online?

Every effort must be made to complete this process online/electronically.

Every employee and every volunteer must have a VIRTUS account for tracking Safe Environment, regardless of whether they have no computer or complete training in person.

If a person is unable to complete the forms online or if the person attends a live session, please provide the person with hard/paper copies of the Sex Abuse Policy Booklet, the Sex Abuse Policy Form, and the Background Check Form to complete by hand. Once completed, the person must return all forms to:

Office of Safe Environment
Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston
1311 Byron St., PO Box 230
Wheeling, WV 26003

If the person returns the forms to your school, please send the forms to the Office of Safe Environment at the address above.

Attendance/sign in sheets for all live VIRTUS training for adults must also be returned to the above address for Safe Environment.

PLEASE NOTE: A volunteer may arrive at your school with an existing VIRTUS account and may or may not be in compliance through a parish or different school. If you have any questions regarding someone who may already be in compliance, please refer to the training videos or the VIRTUS manual on how to use the VIRTUS system to check or call the Office of Safe Environment.

SAFE ENVIRONMENT RECORDS STORAGE

The VIRTUS system is designed to electronically store signatures/acknowledgements, background check consent, and VIRTUS certificates because it is an electronic process that automatically stores/documents compliance.

Past records, prior to the implementation of tracking and documentation using the VIRTUS system, must be retained at your location in a manner that is secure, organized, and easy to retrieve in the event of an allegation of abuse, a lawsuit, or an audit. The Office of Safe Environment retains the right to provide further direction on the storage or transfer of records. In the meantime, please secure your past Safe Environment physical files in a drawer or cabinet that locks and is in a location not accessible to the general public and/or most employees.

SAFE ENVIRONMENT AUDITS

The Diocese undergoes a data collection audit for Safe Environment every year by the USCCB.

The USCCB mandates on-site audits every three (3) years; however, at the Bishop's request, the DWC is on-site audited every year, starting with 2023.

In the meantime, the Diocese also performs periodic internal audits, also at the request of the Bishop to ensure that the Safe Environment process is being carried out at the local level.

For the yearly electronic/data collection audit:

- By the end of April each year, every parish and school receive an audit form to complete. This form will arrive via email to the dwc.org email address as established for your school by the IT department at the Chancery.
- The audit form must be completed and returned to the Chancery no later than 31 May of each year. You may scan and email the form back to the Office of Safe Environment at the Chancery or you may send it via U.S. mail to the Office of Safe Environment at the Chancery.
- The audit form must reflect the number of employees and volunteers who have met all three components of Safe Environment compliance: completion of VIRTUS, background check, and completion of Policy Form. Your school must not have any employees or volunteers who are not in compliance.
- The audit form also will ask for the number of children who have completed the VIRTUS children's awareness program, including the number of opt-outs on file.
- Schools must also list the number of employees who are teachers/educators.

For the yearly on-site audit:

- The electronic/data collection audit protocol still applies and must be carried out as referenced above.

In addition to the yearly electronic/data collection process, auditors may visit your location (it's random and up to the auditors to select the locations they will visit) and ask you to demonstrate Safe Environment compliance for your employees and volunteers. On-site audits may be conducted any time between February and November in any given year.

They may also ask you to:

- Explain the Safe Environment process for our Diocese and what all it entails
- Explain what you do when you receive a complaint of sex abuse
- Show your posters that display instructions for reporting abuse
- Show your parish bulletin/school newsletter or any other documentation that shows instructions for reporting abuse
- Explain the state of West Virginia's requirement for reporting abuse
- Demonstrate your knowledge of the Diocese's Policy Relating to the Sex Abuse Minors and/or the Code of Conduct and Guidelines for Working With Children contained within the Policy

The auditors also may ask you to evaluate the Chancery and how we handle Safe Environment matters. Do you feel supported by the Chancery? Does the Chancery encourage you to notify civil authorities first and foremost? Does the Chancery cooperate with civil authorities to your knowledge? etc ... It is impossible to know what all an auditor would ask, but the above-referenced gives you an idea. Bottom line – simply tell the truth.

BACKGROUND CHECKS AND FINGERPRINTING

Please note: Beginning July 2022, the Diocese requires background checks for all employees and volunteers every three (3) years. We are no longer on a 3-year cycle for

employees and a 5-year cycle for volunteers for background checks. Going forward, **all employees and volunteers are background checked every three (3) years.**

Fingerprinting will be done for Catholic school employees every three (3) years.

EMAIL / COMMUNICATIONS

Last but not least, you should be checking and using the Diocesan issued email for your parish or school. Please check this email daily or at least weekly. Safe Environment communications are always sent to “All Parishes” and “All Schools” and “All Priests” in the chancery’s list serve. The addresses in these groups are the official dwc.org email addresses issued to your parish/school by the IT Department at the Chancery. If you do not know your school’s dwc.org email address or password, please contact the IT Department at the Chancery.

REMINDER: ALL ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE OR NEGLECT MADE AGAINST AN EMPLOYEE OR VOLUNTEER MUST BE REPORTED TO THE OFFICE OF SAFE ENVIRONMENT. IF THERE IS A REPORTABLE OFFENSE, CONTACT CIVIL AUTHORITIES FIRST, AND THEN CONTACT SAFE ENVIRONMENT AT 304.230.1504. IF THERE ARE ANY QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS AS TO WHAT CONSTITUTES A REPORTABLE OFFENSE, PLEASE CALL SAFE ENVIRONMENT OR CIVIL AUTHORITIES. WE CAN HELP GUIDE YOU THROUGH ANY SITUATION.

CONTACT US:

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