

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## SAFE ENVIRONMENT TRAINING FOR CHILDREN & YOUTH

**Q: Why do we educate children and youth with abuse prevention curricula?**

**A:** The safe environment training for children and youth is mandated by the USCCB's *Charter for Protection of Children and Young People* under Article 12. Article 12 of the Charter states:

“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 **children, youth**, parents, ministers, educators, volunteers and others about ways to make and maintain a safe environment for children and young people. Dioceses/eparchies are to **make clear to clergy and all members of the community** the standards of conduct for clergy and other persons in positions of trust with regard to children.”

Therefore, to fulfill our obligation to the *Charter*, the Diocese of Burlington has chosen the Circle of Grace program as the primary program used to teach children and youth about healthy relationships and boundaries. However, parishes and Catholic schools may choose to use other additional programs promulgated by the Bishop as well. The Circle of Grace curriculum is designed to teach children about appropriate boundaries and to help them feel comfortable communicating with their parents or other trusted adults when something isn't right. In summary, we want to give children the tools to help prevent abuse before it has occurred, or to report abuse if they've experienced it. The curriculum of the program accomplishes this goal by underscoring God's love for all of us and by focusing on the Catholic teachings regarding the dignity of the human person. We hope the lessons learned from the curriculum equip children with the tools to cultivate healthy, abuse-free relationships throughout their lives.

---

**Q: I am not comfortable with someone else teaching my child about sexuality. Does the safe environment training include lessons on sexuality?**

**A:** No, the training for children and youth does not include lessons on sexuality. To be clear, safe environment training and “sex ed” have completely different objectives. The goal of safe environment training is to teach children how to identify potential warning signs, or precursors, of abuse. Through the training, children learn how to develop healthy relationships and boundaries, and they learn to tell a trusted adult when something or someone is making them uncomfortable. Unlike “sex ed,” the training DOES NOT explain sexuality, human anatomy, or provide examples of sexual behavior. According to Catholic moral teaching, parents are the first teachers of their children regarding sexuality. We acknowledge and respect the primary role of parents in educating their children about sexuality. If you are still concerned about the contents of the training, please contact your local parish or Catholic school for more information. You may also contact the Office of Safe Environment Programs in the Diocesan Offices.

---

**Q: If I do not want my child(ren) to take the diocese's safe environment training, do I have the option of opting them out?**

**A:** Yes, if you are uncomfortable with your child(ren) participating in the diocese’s safe environment training, you may opt them out. To do so, please contact your local parish or Catholic School to acquire an “opt out form.” The form provides a summary of the program, and it includes a place where you can decline the training for your child(ren). Your parish or Catholic school will offer to let you take the materials home to teach the lessons yourself, but do not feel obligated to accept them.

The safe environment training is taught in every parish and Catholic school in the diocese on an annual basis. If you would like to opt your child(ren) out year after year, we ask that you submit a new opt out form to your local parish or Catholic school annually.

## VIRTUS QUESTIONS

**Q:** What can you tell me about the Virtus online training program?

**A:** Virtus is an online training program designed to streamline the important child safety elements for the leaders and volunteers responsible for a school, parish, or other organization within the Roman Catholic Diocese of Burlington.

By participating online in the Virtus program, volunteers/employees who work with minors will:

- Receive their safe environment training annually, for those who directly serve minors
- Complete and submit their background screening form (every five years)
- Read the Diocesan Policies on Ethics and Integrity in Ministry
- Sign the Code of Conduct

The Virtus program will send out automatically-generated email reminders to notify users when it is time for them to complete a new training or update a safe environment requirement.

The Virtus program also streamlines the experience for each Safe Environment Local Coordinator assigned to every parish and Catholic school in the diocese. Each Safe Environment Local Coordinator can see all the individuals registered at their location, and they can access reporting tools to track each user’s progress. These tools, combined with others offered by the program, make the Virtus program user-friendly and convenient for both the users and the program administrators.

---

**Q:** How long does it take to complete each course?

**A:** The length varies by course; some courses are a little longer than others. On average, it should take about 60 minutes to complete your course. However, you do not need to complete your course in one sitting. You may log out at any time and your place will be saved for completion later.

---

**Q:** Is there any cost or fee to take the Virtus training?

**A:** No, there is no cost or fee that you must pay to take the Virtus training. It is free for you to complete. The Office of Safe Environment Programs in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Burlington covers the entire cost of the training.

---

**Q:** Do I have to print off my certificate?

**A:** No, you are not required to print off your certificate. When you receive your certificate, your name is automatically added to an online database of individuals who have completed their youth protection training. The certificate is for your own use and you may print it off according to your own preference.

---

**Q:** Does Virtus offer additional training materials between each annual course?

**A:** Virtus offers monthly bulletins that are optional reading.

---

**Q:** I completed the safe environment training through my parish. I want to volunteer at my child's Catholic school. Do I have to go through all the steps again?

**A:** Both parishes and schools require the same youth protection training. However, the background check required for parishes differs from the background check required for schools.

---

**Q:** I have completed other abuse prevention trainings as a volunteer or employee for other organizations. Do I still need to participate in this training?

**A:** Good question! While it is wonderful to hear that you've had some exposure to other abuse prevention trainings, we still need you to undergo our own training. Every abuse prevention training on the market is different, and we customized our courses through Virtus to ensure that you are learning important child safety lessons from a Catholic perspective. Since we cannot easily verify what you learned in previous trainings or analyze the quality of your previous trainings, it is best that you simply complete our own training. By completing our training, we can guarantee that you are being exposed to the same child safety lessons all other volunteers and employees in the diocese are learning. We also need you to complete our training to ensure that you are familiar with our specific diocesan policies, procedures, and behavioral expectations. Thank you for understanding the importance of taking our safe environment training.

## BACKGROUND CHECK QUESTIONS

**Q:** Who should receive a background check and safe environment training?

**A:** All adults who work or volunteer closely with minors in the diocese, including members of the clergy, are required to undergo a criminal background check and complete annual safe environment training. Positions expected to fulfill these requirements include, but are not limited to, priests, deacons, seminarians, Catholic school teachers and administrators, substitute teachers, coaches, youth ministry leaders, chaperones and volunteers for youth events, drivers for youth events, camp counselors, directors of religious education, safe environment coordinators, catechists, substitute catechists, aides, and other paid or unpaid positions which

involve direct contact with minors.

If you are unsure as to whether you or someone else needs to complete the safe environment requirements, please contact the Office of Safe Environment Programs for further guidance.

**PLEASE NOTE: For the purposes of the Human Resources Office, all paid personnel will need to complete a background check through the Human Resources Office upon being hired.**

---

**Q: Is there any cost or fee associated with the processing of my background check?**

**A:** School employees must submit to a Title 16 criminal background check. School volunteers must submit to a National Child Protection Act (NCPA) criminal background check. Please contact the Catholic Schools Office to inquire about any costs associated with the fingerprinting procedure. The Catholic Schools Office can answer any questions you may have about the fingerprinting procedure.

At this time, there is no cost or fee for employees or volunteers at Parish churches. The Office of Safe Environment Programs in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Burlington takes care of all background check processing and screening costs for parish employees and volunteers.

---

**Q: Why does the background check require me to report my Social Security Number (SSN)?**

**A:** We need your full Social Security Number to run a complete, verifiable, and accurate background check. Without your Social Security Number, we will not be able to run important screenings connected to your identity and potential criminal history. Your Social Security Number will not be used for any other purpose beyond running your background check, and your sensitive identification information will be stored securely.

Failure to submit your full Social Security Number, or refusal to share other identification information pertinent to your background check, may preclude you from consideration for the position.

---

**Q: How do I know if my background check form submission was successful?**

**A:** After you've filled out all the required fields and submitted your forms, you should be redirected to a page with a clear message saying that you've successfully submitted your forms.

---

**Q: Can I complete my youth protection training or criminal background check other than online, with a computer?**

**A:** No, both programs require the use of a computer.

---

**Q: I am a student volunteer (under the age of 18) who works with other minors. Do I need to take the Virtus training or undergo a background screening?**

**A:** If you are a minor who is serving other minors at one of our parishes or Catholic schools, you must be directly supervised by an adult who has undergone a background check and completed their safe environment training. You are not required to submit a criminal background check or take the Virtus training until you are 18 years of age.

Please contact the Safe Environment Local Coordinator where you are volunteering and they will provide further guidance.

---

**Q: Doesn't this take a lot of time and effort?**

**A:** While the time involved for any role or position sometimes proves to be a challenge in the bustle of daily life, you demonstrate your commitment to the dignity and safety of children by filling out the necessary forms and taking the required child safety training. By complying with all safe environment requirements, you help the children and youth of your community thrive in a safe environment where the risk of harm or abuse is significantly reduced. Remember, keeping children safe is ALWAYS worth the time and effort. Every minute spent protecting God's children is never wasted.