



**Diocese of Gary**  
**Safe Environment Policy**  
**Effective June 13, 2003**

The Diocese of Gary established the Sexual Misconduct Toward Minors and Others at Risk Policy in July 1993. To implement this policy as revised on April 1, 2003, a Safe Environment Plan has been established in order to:

- provide a safe and secure environment for the children and youth in the faith communities within our Diocese of Gary
- assist the Diocese in evaluating a person's suitability to work with children, youth or the elderly
- satisfy the concerns of parents and staff members with a screening process
- provide a system to respond to the victims and their families, as well as the accused
- reduce the possibility of false accusations against clergy, employees, and volunteers
- reduce the risk exposure of the parishes and the Diocese of Gary

**Purpose:**

This policy applies to the programs that provide specific training in the prevention, recognition and reporting of child abuse that are developed and/or offered by the Diocese and is

- a. **Required** of all Diocesan personnel and volunteers directly involved or in contact with children
- b. **Required** of all children and youth who participate in activities, services and programs under the auspices of the Dioceses and
- c. **Recommended** of parents and other adults who participate or have children who participate in activities, services and programs under the auspices of the Diocese.

The objective of these programs is to prevent, recognize and appropriately report child abuse through educational programs, such as seminars, workshops and meetings, provided by the Diocese and completed by all Diocesan personnel who have substantial contact with children, on an annual basis.

**Procedure:**

1. All Diocesan personnel will be given the following documents to read:
  - a. "Sexual Misconduct Toward Minors and Others at Risk"
  - b. "Safe Environment Plan"
  - c. "Practical Guidelines for a Safe Environment for Our Youth"

2. All Diocesan personnel will be given a statement to sign to verify that the above documents have been given to them and have been read.
3. The following Diocesan personnel shall participate in a Virtus training session, **“Protecting God’s Children”** program, a Safe Environment awareness session about the nature and scope of the problem of child sexual abuse in our society:
  - a. All active priests, deacons and members of religious communities in the Diocese of Gary
  - b. All principals, administrative staff, teachers, guidance counselors, librarians, all volunteers and staff at all levels, including aides, janitors, food service workers, school nurses, and office personnel of all Catholic elementary, middle and high schools
  - c. All directors, catechists, staff, and volunteers of religious education programs and youth ministry programs
  - d. All Diocesan personnel providing child care services
  - e. All youth ministry coordinators, directors/coaches of children’s activities (e.g., athletics, scout troops, choir, camp counselors, etc.) and similar Diocesan personnel who provide such services.
4. This requirement must be met at the earliest possible date and no later than **sixty (60) days** following the assumption of their duties and any contact with children. A list of Virtus training sessions offered in the diocese is available from the diocesan website, [www.dcgary.org](http://www.dcgary.org).
5. Additionally, after the completion of the Virtus training session, you are required to continue online training by registering with Virtus ([www.virtusonline.org](http://www.virtusonline.org)) and reading a monthly bulletin delivered to your individual Virtus account. The Diocese of Gary requires 24 online training bulletins.
6. Pastor/parochial administrators, principals and agency directors will ensure that all personnel required to receive training do so within the requisite time period or are removed from contact with children for failure to attend appropriate training programs. Parishes, schools and agency offices will maintain lists of those who have completed the training requirement.

**Application:**

The Superintendent of Schools, the Director of Religious Education, and the Youth Director will ensure that age-appropriate abuse prevention education programs are available at both the elementary (K-8<sup>th</sup> grade) and secondary (9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade) levels. Each school, religious education program and youth program is required to submit the curriculum to the School Office.

Such programs shall be provided annually to children in all grades of every Catholic school and religious education programs as well as youth ministry programs in the Diocese.

### **Screening Procedures:**

The following screening procedures are to be used with all clergy, staff, and volunteers who work with children, youth, senior citizens or the developmentally disabled. All collected information is to be treated as confidential.

- Screening. Volunteers should have attended the parish an adequate length of time to become well known by the other adults and leaders.
- Employment application. Those applying for a paid position must complete an employment application.
- Reference check. Maintain a written record of each reference check.
- Interview. Interview each new applicant.
- Criminal Background Check. Conduct a criminal background check on clergy, staff, and volunteers who work with children, youth, senior citizens, or the developmentally disabled.  
Criminal background checks will be completed every five years on active clergy, staff, and volunteers.
- If the person hired has not lived in Indiana in the past five (5) years, the parish or applicant must pay for a national background check. Contact the Schools Office for the information.

### **Results of Criminal Background Checks:**

- When the criminal background check on a candidate is clear, the pastor will be notified that everything is fine.
- A questionable criminal background check will be reviewed by the Safe Environment Committee. The Pastor will receive the committee's decision of whether or not the individual is cleared.
- Anyone with a pending conviction or who has been convicted of sexual misconduct will not be permitted to work or volunteer in a Diocesan sponsored environment.

### **Confidentiality:**

Like all personal records, information obtained through the Screening, Application, Reference, Interview, and Criminal Background Check must be kept confidential. It is recommended that all material be kept in a locked file cabinet and access to it is restricted to administrators. These materials should be destroyed after three years of the employees' employment is terminated or the volunteer ceases his/her volunteer duties.