



VIRTUS FAQs FOR PRINCIPALS AND PASTORS

Who must comply with the Safe Environment Program? All employees and volunteers.

What are the components of the Diocese of Knoxville's Safe Environment Program?

- Diocese of Knoxville Policy and Procedure Relating to Sexual Misconduct. All employees, volunteers and regular independent contractors are required to read the document and sign Appendices D, F and H.
- Position-specific background check. All employees and must undergo a limited background check, depending on the position each will fill.
- *Protecting God's Children* session. All employees, volunteers and regular independent contractors must attend a three-hour presentation and continuing education online.
- Keeping Kids Safe. Ongoing training of children using age-appropriate material done annually in class by catechist or Catholic school teacher.

What is required for an employee or volunteer to become compliant?

- Before the person actually begins volunteering or begins work, s/he must
 - sign a consent for a background check.
 - read and sign the Diocese of Knoxville Policy and Procedure Relating to Sexual Misconduct.
- Within 30 days of starting, s/he must have attended a *Protecting God's Children* session. If s/he fails to do this, s/he will not be permitted to volunteer (or continue working) until the class is completed.

How do I schedule a training class?

E-mail the Virtus administrators, Margaret Hunt (mhunt@dioknox.org) or Marcy Meldahl (mmeldahl@dioknox.org) and provide the following information:

- Location and address of the session, including name of building or other location (e.g., "Family Life Center" or "Shea Room.")
- Date and time of session and estimated duration.
- Number of spaces available.
- Other important information such as whether site is wheelchair accessible, etc.
- Language in which class will be offered.

How does someone register for *Protecting God's Children* training?

1. Go to www.virtusonline.org.
2. At far left: Click "Register"
3. Follow prompts.
4. Day of training: **SIGN IN** on paper roster at the site and attend session.
5. When individual has done all of above, s/he will receive e-mail activating him or her in the system.

Note: people MUST create an account online for proof they have been trained.



How does someone complete training bulletins online?

1. After s/he has been activated by the VIRTUS administrator, the individual will begin receiving e-mails from “system@virtus.org” announcing the availability of a new bulletin and giving a link to the site.
2. Log on with username and password.
3. Click on “My Training” tab.
4. On far right, there is a box titled “Training Bulletin Report.”
5. Click on message that says there are training bulletin(s) to complete.
6. Read the bulletin and answer the multiple choice question to get credit for the bulletin.

Note: The person must go to “My Training” tab to access the training bulletin. S/he must answer a multiple-choice question about what was read. The article on the front page of the website—available to the public—is *not* the required training bulletin.

The individual is responsible for maintaining his or her online account and for being able to produce proof of training (and proof of status regarding training bulletins, if requested). Remind people to keep their accounts up to date, including a current e-mail address.

Someone has a new e-mail address. How does s/he change that information on the VIRTUS website?

To change an e-mail address (or any other personal information) on the VIRTUS website, do the following:

1. Log onto www.virtusonline.org using username & password.
2. Click on “Update my Account.”
3. After changing personal information, click “Save.”

An individual tells me s/he participated in the Safe Environment Program at another parish. Is this sufficient to comply with DOK procedures?

First, if the program didn’t include the video Protecting God’s Children, she will have to attend a PGC session in our diocese. And, of course, s/he has to undergo a background check and sign the DOK sexual misconduct policy in any case.

Someone wants to volunteer at our school was compliant with the Safe Environment Program as his or her parish. Does he or she have to go through all the steps again?

Ask the person for proof of training, which can be obtained from his or her online VIRTUS account. The person doesn’t have to attend a PGC session again, but will have to undergo a new background check at your school and re-sign Appendices D, F and H of the Diocese of Knoxville Policy and Procedure Relating to Sexual Misconduct.

What is involved in the Keeping Kids Safe portion of the Safe Environment Program?

Annual training is conducted at each child’s Catholic school or in religious education classes using age-appropriate material. At the beginning of the school year, parents are given a *Keeping Kids Safe* acknowledgement form to complete and return. A parent either acknowledges s/he is aware the training will be offered or declines to have his or her child(ren) participate.

If s/he declines, he or she must complete the *Keeping Kids Safe* decline form, available in the *Keeping Kids Safe* classroom materials. DREs and school principals will be required to complete attendance/training comple-



tion forms for all students enrolled in the program, and will submit those to the diocesan office of Religious Education by Feb 1st of each school year. All students enrolled in kindergarten-12th grade are required to participate or have a written parental decline form on file.

What should a teacher or catechist do if a child discloses abuse?

Pastors, Catholic school principals, and/or parish catechetical leaders are to provide the following information to all of those involved with educating children in their respective programs. This material should also be verbally reviewed with teachers and catechists so they can be both aware and confident of how to proceed in the event that a child reports inappropriate sexual or physical conduct during a class session.

If you have a counselor or someone else trained to talk with the child, it would be very helpful to have a professionally prepared person available during class sessions when *Keeping Kids Safe* material will be reviewed.

- If children disclose potential abuse concerns to you, it means they feel safe in your presence. It is VERY important that you do not overreact emotionally. Strong responses, such as becoming upset or visibly concerned, can cause children to shut down, and they may not risk discussing their concerns again. Your initial response can influence whether children will share their concerns with others in the future so it is crucial to stay attentive but not overly emotional. Talk with the child using the same tone of voice you would use with one who has fallen and scraped his or her elbow or knee.
- It is OK to be an “active listener,” responding with comments such as “It must have been scary for you,” “I’m sorry that happened to you,” and “Thank you for telling me so we can help you.”
- If you are the person the child feels comfortable talking with, you need to listen to the child in depth and let him or her know that options such as counseling are available.
- Remember that your role is to listen to the child, NOT to ask probing questions, because doing this could put ideas in a child’s mind and contaminate the evidence.
- At some point in the discussion, let the child know that you are going to contact someone who can help. With older children you can mention the Department of Human Services. Young children likely would not understand this and could become frightened, so inform them that you are going to get them some help. This is a very sensitive situation and must be approached with great care.
- We are obligated to follow our diocesan sexual conduct policy and are mandated to report suspected abuse to the proper authorities. However, the timing of this reporting is very important. When in doubt about how to proceed, contact one of the following people:
 - Marla Lenihan, the diocesan assistance coordinator;
 - Deacon Sean Smith, the chancellor;
 - Dr. Sherry Morgan, the superintendent of Catholic Schools;
 - Sister Mary Timothea Elliott, the director of the Office of Christian Formation.
- When children report potential abuse, we are cautioned to use common sense and also to display compassion and love so that those involved will not be further hurt in their attempt to get the help they need.

What should I do if I suspect abuse but the child does not disclose it? Tell one of the above people.