

SAFE ENVIRONMENT PROGRAM POLICY FOR THE DIOCESE OF EL PASO

Throughout the Scriptures, the little ones always had a special role in God's plan of salvation. So important for Jesus was the safeguarding of children that he taught: Whoever receives one child such as this in my name, receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but the One who sent me.

The Safe Environment Program of the Diocese of El Paso exists in order to ensure that children and youth, who worship, study or participate in activities sponsored by the Diocese, parishes, and parish schools will do so in the safest environment possible. All entities of the Diocese, their employees, and volunteers must comply with the Safe Environment Program Policy and the Sexual Misconduct Policy of the Diocese of El Paso.

The Diocese has developed training programs which will educate clergy, religious, seminarians, and corporation, school, and parish employees and volunteers. The Safe Environment Program also includes parents, children, and youth. Each individual who is a diocesan personnel or diocesan, corporation, parish, or school volunteer must undergo Safe Environment training and a criminal background check prior to beginning his duties. Annually, there is a required renewal with an additional training in order for the individual to continue in his role. Compliance with diocesan Safe Environment Program Policy is necessary to protect our children and young people from predators when they are participating in any Church related activities.

Diocesan personnel must be aware of their own vulnerability and that of any individual minor with whom they may be working. Diocesan personnel should avoid establishing any exclusive relationship with a minor and exercise due caution when they become aware of a minor desiring such a relationship. Both the participants and members of the church community can misunderstand such relationships. If you recognize inappropriate personal or physical attraction developing between an adult and a minor, notify the parish/school Safe Environment Coordinator and/or pastor.

For the purpose of this document, a minor is anyone under the age of 18. Regulations that apply to minors also apply to vulnerable adults who may have mental or physical limitations.

CODE OF CONDUCT

In ministry there are several practical guidelines which enable diocesan personnel to be pastoral while ensuring both the safety of minors and the protection of the diocesan personnel from allegations.

Any person having cause to believe that a child has been physically or sexually abused or neglected by any person shall make a report to Child Protective Services (1-800-252-5400) or law enforcement. All adults are mandated reporters.

The acquisition, possession, or distribution of pornographic material containing the images of minors is prohibited and is a criminal offense.

Interactions between diocesan personnel and minors should occur in public spaces whenever possible.

A team approach, with a good ratio of adults to young people, is preferable.

When meeting one-on-one with a minor, meet in a public area or if in a room, leave the door open. If a door must be closed, meet in a room with a window in the door and never lock the door.

If possible, have a second adult present when meeting with a minor.

If possible, have more than one adult present when meeting with a group of minors.

Do not be in a car alone with a minor.

Do not invite an individual minor to an activity outside of church sponsored activities.

Avoid having church activities in your home. However, if that is the only available location, seek approval from the diocesan Safe Environment Coordinator or the Chancellor. If approval is received, at least one other diocesan personnel should also be present.

Physical contact with minors can be misconstrued by both minors and adults and should only occur under appropriate public circumstances. If a minor is uncomfortable with any type of physical contact, then adults should refrain from such contact and not ridicule that minor.

Do not engage in the physical discipline of a minor. Discipline problems should be handled in coordination with your supervisor and/or the parents of the minor.

Be proactive in identifying children and youth who may be vulnerable or at risk for unhealthy relationships.

Diocesan personnel should never use or supply alcohol, drugs, or cigarettes in the presence of minors.

Do not administer medication of any kind without written parental permission.

Overnight trips or activities require additional caution.

Parental permission must be obtained before a minor may participate in any overnight activity.

There must be a sufficient number of adults (who have completed Safe Environment requirements and who are of good moral character) to chaperone the minors.

No alcohol, drugs, or nicotine products shall be available to minors, and chaperones must abstain from the use of alcohol and drugs on the trip.

Diocesan personnel and any other chaperones are prohibited from sleeping in the same beds, sleeping bags, or small tents with minors unless the adult is an immediate family member of the minor. If an adult supervisor stays in a hotel or other sleeping room with a group of minors, the supervisor should sleep in his or her own bed using a roll away or cot or sleep on the floor if necessary.

Diocesan personnel shall remain modestly clothed and not change clothing in the same room as minors.

Do not take an overnight trip alone with a minor who is not a member of your immediate family.

Diocesan personnel should not be alone in locker rooms or other dressing rooms with a single minor without another adult present.

Do not drive a vehicle with a minor present unless you have received prior authorization and have the appropriate license and/or certification.

Do not drive a parish, corporation, or school vehicle unless you have received prior authorization and have the appropriate license and/or certification.

Do not permit children to cross a road by themselves while they are in your custodial care.

Do not take photographs of minors while they are unclothed or dressing (e.g. in a locker room or bathing facility).

Do not post photographs of minors on social media without parental authorization.

If a minor reports to diocesan personnel, including volunteers, that he/she feels uncomfortable around certain adults, this report must be shared with the parish/school Safe Environment Coordinator and pastor or principal. If it is believed that no action is being taking to address a report that seems to have substance, then diocesan officials must also be given the report. These officials include the Chancellor, Safe Environment Coordinator, and Victims Assistance Coordinator.

Diocesan personnel, including volunteers, are not to give gifts or take minors to special events or dinners, as this may be considered grooming. A token gift for a birthday or Christmas may be an exception.

Requirements related to rectories and clergy

No minor child or adult may reside in any church rectory or other living quarters of priests.

Only immediate family members, visiting priests, seminarians, or diocesan personnel (who are visiting for work) may be overnight guests in rectories or priests' residences. Seminarians assigned to the parish may reside in rectories and priests' residences.

Clergy are not to provide overnight accommodations in rectories or other personal residences for minors, with the exception of occasional visits from immediate family members.

Minors are not permitted in the private living quarters of the rectories.

In the event of an emergency situation, the cleric shall notify the Bishop, Chancellor, Vicar General, or Moderator of the Curia of the situation and request guidance. If this notification is verbal, the cleric shall also send an email or text to the individual notified in order to provide documentation.

Visiting priests must have a letter of good standing from their Ordinary or Superior before performing any function in a parish. The pastor or administrator is responsible to determine if the letter has been received by the Chancery.

If one-on-one pastoral care of a minor should be necessary, avoid meeting in isolated environments. Schedule meetings at times and use locations that create accountability. Limit both the length and number of sessions, and make appropriate referrals. Notify parents of the meetings.

When a minor seeks guidance from a cleric regarding a family or other personal situation, the cleric is to remember that he (the cleric) is not a professional licensed to provide counseling for problems outside his area of expertise and competence. A referral to a mental health or medical professional is appropriate in those situations.

A cleric should generally meet with adult staff and volunteers during regular rectory hours. It is in his best interest to avoid working with a single individual late at night and alone, lest the situation be misinterpreted.

It is the policy of the Diocese to investigate thoroughly all reports of any violation of these standards, to make any required reports to civil authorities, and to appropriately discipline or terminate the responsible person in the case of any serious violations.

BACKGROUND CHECKS

All diocesan personnel whether, clergy, religious, seminarians, employees or volunteers will be required to have their backgrounds checked, including a criminal background check with fingerprints. The criminal background check will be completed prior to employment or volunteer activity. No person who has abused a minor will be appointed, employed, or permitted to volunteer for the Diocese.

The information received from the background check process will be retained.

Requirements for Seminarians

Those seeking to enter the diocesan seminary will submit an application for a background check, including finger prints. Satisfactory completion of the background check is a condition for entry into the seminary. If a candidate for the seminary has credibly abused a minor in the past, he shall not be accepted into the seminary. It is preferable for an individual from outside the United States to have a known person of good character provide information on the one seeking entry. If a seminarian from another seminary seeks entry to the diocesan seminary, a copy of the seminarian's file from the other seminary(ies) must be provided.

Requirements for Ordination to the Diaconate and Priesthood

Those seeking ordination to the diaconate or priesthood will submit an application for a background check including finger prints, six months prior to the anticipated date of ordination as a transitional deacon. Satisfactory completion of the background check is a condition of ordination. The candidate's personnel file shall also be reviewed. If a seminarian, candidate for the permanent diaconate, or transitional deacon has been credibly accused of abusing a minor in the past, he shall not be ordained to the diaconate or priesthood.

If a transitional deacon has been a deacon for more than a year, another review of his file and background will be required prior to ordination to the priesthood.

Requirements for Incardination

Priests and deacons from outside the Diocese seeking incardination in the Diocese will submit an application for a background check, including finger prints, six months prior to the anticipated date of incardination. Satisfactory completion of the background check is a condition of incardination. The candidate's personnel file from his diocese or religious order and this diocese will also be reviewed prior to incardination. A letter from the priest's or deacon's ordinary stating that he is in good standing must be on file.

SAFE ENVIRONMENT PROGRAM TRAINING

The Diocese of El Paso has developed a Safe Environment training program for diocesan personnel in order to provide a safe environment for all children and youth. The diocesan program for adults contains information describing appropriate and inappropriate behaviors, what abuse is, how to identify behaviors which may be used by those seeking to abuse, and

possible signs of abuse. There is emphasis on the legal requirement to report suspected abuse to the appropriate authorities.

The programs for youth and children are designed to help them understand and recognize what appropriate behavior and inappropriate behavior are. There is an emphasis on telling an appropriate adult if abuse or inappropriate behavior should occur.

All diocesan employees of the diocese must complete the Safe Environment training prior to employment. All diocesan volunteers must complete Safe Environment prior to volunteering.

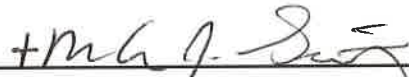
The Church is committed to the protection of all God's children.

PROMULGATION

Date of Revision and Adoption

The revised SAFE ENVIRONMENT PROGRAM POLICY FOR THE DIOCESE OF EL PASO, including CODE OF CONDUCT are promulgated on the 13th day of November, 2023 and shall become effective immediately.

The Diocese

By 
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Mrs. Patricia L. Rueda, MAPS
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