

CHILDREN AND YOUTH TRAINING

VIRTUS PROTECTING GOD'S CHILDREN FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Catholic schools and parish religious education programs throughout the Diocese of New Ulm have been teaching children about personal safety and a safe environment since 2003, using *Creating Safe and Sacred Places*.

Beginning with the 2007-2008 school year, the Diocese began utilizing the VIRTUS children's training program as a complement to the VIRTUS adult training program.

The program is age-appropriate and respects a parent's role as their child's primary educator. Parents may review all program materials before their children receive instruction. Contact your local parish/school office.

Schools and religious education programs will notify parents at the beginning of the school or program year of the dates for Safe Environment lessons. This will be done PRIOR to the Safe Environment lessons being taught. A time-frame for teaching the lessons is given as a directive through the diocesan Safe Environment Coordinator. Lessons are typically mandated to be taught in October or prior to November 10.

Safe Environment training is not "sex education." The Safe Environment training program for children and young people in the Diocese of New Ulm has been approved by the Bishop of New Ulm, who has determined that the program respects the right of parents to be the primary educators of their children and promotes Catholic values and morals.

Every parent has the right to choose to remove his/her child from Safe Environment training. An "opt out" form will be provided to each family at the beginning of the school year. If a child is "opted out," the parent will be provided with printed material for them to convey the information covered in the lessons to their child.

Every parish and school should have a DVD that has the lesson introductory videos. These introductory videos may be shown to the appropriate grades as a group, if the program so chooses, and then the students may go to the classroom for the lessons that are assigned for the year. The DVD is labeled, "Protecting God's Children" and also has the VIRTUS logo stamped on it.

Forms used by schools and religious education programs are sent out annually in early to mid August. Sample forms are included. Local Safe Environment Coordinators receive the forms annually and should replace the current form in the notebook with the most recent form provided. Forms included are:

- a. Opt-Out Form
- b. Absent/Makeup Form
- c. Children's Training Reporting Form

OPT-OUT Process For Parishes and Schools Children Training

The National Office of Child and Youth Protection, which reports to the USCCB, has mandated that dioceses implement an “OPT-OUT” form for parents who choose not to have their children participate in the diocesan safe environment program. We look on this as a positive exercise in accountability and good opportunity for parents, who may be thinking of not having their children participate, to re-think the issue. It will also be a good opportunity for you as Pastoral Leader, Principal, Local Safe Environment Coordinator or Parish Catechetical Leader to have a conversation with these parents to ascertain and comment what their issues or concerns are. To that end, we have designed a simple “OPT-OUT” form and a process for its implementation.

- All parents are to be provided with the dates and the information regarding the VIRTUS children’s training lessons. All parents are to be provided with the Opt Out form should they choose to opt out their children.
- If a form is submitted, the program leader should have a discussion with the parent/guardian to assure they understand what they have signed and the expectations associated with opting their children out. Sometimes, especially in the fall of the year when there are so many forms, the parent can be quick to sign a form believe they are “giving permission to the program” not denying “permission.”
- Tell the parent/guardian that they are free to review any of the safe environment program material/media and inform them that they are welcome to participate in the program with their child.
- Document on the form the issues/concerns voiced by the parent.
- Keep a copy of the form on file at the Parish/School and send the original form to the “Safe Environment Coordinator” at the diocesan Pastoral Center.

Make sure that the OPT-OUT forms account for the number of children in the family that are Opting Out and the total is the same as on the summary reporting form you are submitting.

Absent students, regardless of the reason, are marked on the reporting form as absent and not as having opted-out.

On the following page is a sample email that is sent out each August with the required reporting forms.

SAMPLE AUGUST EMAIL WITH FORMS:

Subject: VIRTUS Children's Training documents

Dear School Principals, DREs, and parish catechetical leader:

Notice: Local Safe Environment Coordinators are also receiving this e-mail.

Please note that during this school year VIRTUS children's training, Lessons x and x will be taught in the Diocese of New Ulm.

Attached are the forms that your parish/school will need to report Children's Training to the diocese this year; please use ONLY the forms attached.

1. Opt Out Form** Opt out forms provided to parents must include the Overview and Teaching Touching Safety Quick Reference Guide. (English and Spanish)
2. Absent Form - includes a column to enter the absent student's attendance at a later make-up session, if applicable
3. VIRTUS Children's Training report form
4. VIRTUS Touching Safety Program Overview (English and Spanish)
5. VIRTUS Teaching Touching Safety Quick Reference Guide (English and Spanish)
6. Children's Training - Diocesan Timeline

If a child is opted out, the parent/guardian is to receive the age-appropriate Lessons 5 & 6 (for Fall 2016) [access those by logging on to your VIRTUS account; go to the Educator Tab; go to step 3 and choose the age level and lesson 5 & 6].

The parent/guardian acknowledges on the opt out form that they have been provided with the Overview and Teaching Touching Safety Quick Reference Guide, that they take responsibility to instruct their child on the concepts contained in these documents, and that they will use the age appropriate Lessons to train their child on personal safety/safe environment provided to them by the parish upon receipt of the signed opt out form.

Important Dates to Remember: [Dates slightly vary from year to year]

October 1 - VIRTUS account updates including Catechists and School personnel are to be submitted to the Safe Environment Office Note: Additional catechist names and school personnel are to be submitted as they become known or changes occur.)

October to first week in November - Children's Training taught in schools and religious education programs.

November 10 - Deadline for schools/parishes to report children's training including the first copy of the Absent list. (Absent list with the make-ups to be resubmitted after make-ups occur.)

February 2 - Deadline for reporting the Make-up training attendance - Resubmit the completed absent and makeup form

All completed children's safe environment training correspondence should be mailed to Jeovana Michels at the pastoral center address.

Thank you for your attention to these requirements.