

Child Protection Policies FAQs

Catholic Schools of the Diocese of Knoxville



Preparing Scholars, Leaders, and Saints

How do the Catholic schools within the diocese screen school personnel?

All adult employees in the Catholic schools are given a criminal background check prior to employment. Employees and applicants subject to this screening process may not work with or be around minors until successful completion of the entire background screening process, including reference verifications, and the Safe Environment Program training is accomplished.

Who must comply with the Safe Environment Program?

The Catholic schools have a particular responsibility to take steps to ensure that, as far as possible, those who serve and those who are served have a safe and healthy environment in which they may live, work, play, and pray. All personnel and volunteers must comply with the Safe Environment Program and the Diocese of Knoxville Policy and Procedure relating to Sexual Misconduct.

How are volunteers defined?

Volunteers are defined as any individual who has the opportunity to be alone with or in proximity to either a minor (below 18 years of age) or a vulnerable adult. Any person who plans to volunteer at the school, in classrooms, chaperone school trips, or assist with school activities must submit to a background check and successfully complete the Safe Environment Program training known as Virtus.

Do diocesan and church employees or contract services staff have to be checked if their responsibilities do not involve regular contact with children?

Although these individuals may not be involved on a regular basis with minors, their presence in the school, Church, or diocese implies trust and recognition, simply by their involvement with the school, parish, or diocese. In view of this implied trust, background checks are required for them.

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

- All employees and volunteers consent to a background check that follows the requirements of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and the federal Fair Credit Reporting Act, which governs the use of background checks. The consent requires completing and signing an “Authorization and Release for the Procurement of an Investigative Report”.
- All employees and volunteers must sign a “Fair Credit Reporting Act Disclosure Regarding Consumer Reports and investigative Consumer Reports” (required by federal law).
- All employees and volunteers are given and must read the “*Policy and procedures Relating to Sexual Misconduct*” documents in their entirety and after careful reading sign the acknowledgement forms (Appendices, D, F, and H) confirming they have read the documents.
- All employees and volunteers must attend a three-hour training session called “Protecting God’s Children”.
- All employees and volunteers must complete ongoing training through regular and consistent training through the online Virtus training bulletins.
- Failure to abide by any part of the diocesan *Policy and Procedures Relating to Sexual Misconduct* are grounds for immediate termination of employment. Volunteers who fail to abide by any part of the diocesan policy will not be allowed to volunteer in the schools or in proximity to children.
- The Catholic schools also instruct their students through a developmentally appropriate *Keeping Kids Safe* curriculum that is taught to all students at every grade level. Parents or guardians have the right to opt out of the instruction for their students through an informed consent form provided by the school.

When are *Protecting God’s Children* sessions offered?

Sessions are scheduled periodically, but at least once a month in each deanery. Catholic School Employees are offered the training through the annual *New Employee Orientation* held at the Chancery in the summer prior to the school year. Volunteers may register for sessions by going to www.virtusonline.org.

I participated in the Safe Environment Program at my parish or in another diocese, do I have to do it again to volunteer in my child’s school?

After providing proof of prior training with the Safe Environment Program through presentation of the certification and verification of completed bulletins, the volunteer will not have to do the training again. However, the volunteer will have to undergo a new background check at the school and re-sign the Appendices

acknowledging that he/she has read the *Diocese of Knoxville Policy and Procedure Relating to Sexual Misconduct* and FCRA disclosure.

Who is responsible for reporting suspected child abuse?

The purpose of these policies and procedures is to protect all children from acts of brutality, abuse, and neglect. Safeguarding youth is a priority of the diocese and all the Catholic schools and churches within the diocese. With these protective policies in place, it is the responsibility of each individual **to strictly follow** them as well as **to immediately report any violation** that one may observe or otherwise witness. All diocesan employees having knowledge of or possessing a reasonable suspicion of an incident of sexual misconduct with a minor by anyone shall comply with all applicable state reporting requirements.

- All school personnel must immediately report suspected cases of brutality, abuse, neglect, or child sexual abuse to Child Protective Services or one of the following: a judge having jurisdiction over the child, the sheriff of the county where the child resides, a chief law enforcement official of the municipality where the child resides.
- Supervisors and administrators may not impede or inhibit this reporting in any way.
- After reporting to the appropriate authorities, the employee reporting shall document the nature of the suspected abuse and the time it is noticed, the date, time of the report, along with the name of the person and agency to whom the case was reported.
- This documentation is then submitted to the principal/president and the pastor immediately, and the principal/president/pastor shall send a copy to the Superintendent of Catholic Schools.
- The Superintendent shall immediately confer with the bishop or his representative to determine whether the *Diocese of Knoxville Policy and Procedure on Sexual Misconduct* is applicable to this situation.
- The incident or suspected sexual misconduct must also be promptly and thoroughly reported to the diocesan Office of Child Protection.
- The Office of Child Protection maintains a Diocesan Review Board that functions as a confidential consultative body. The majority of its members are lay person not in the employ of the Diocese of Knoxville. These members include representatives from law enforcement professionals, a medical doctor, and a clinical psychologist.

What is the Diocese of Knoxville procedure for reporting sexual abuse?

Anyone who has factual knowledge of or who has reasonable cause to suspect an incident of sexual abuse should report such information to the appropriate civil authorities first, and also the diocesan victims' assistance coordinator, **Marla Lenihan, 865-482-1388**.

Sexual misconduct with minors is both a sin and a crime. The Diocese strictly prohibits inappropriate contact with minors. The Diocese will take appropriate decisive action on all accusations of sexual misconduct with minors in accordance with the applicable provisions of civil and canon law. Credible evidence of sexual misconduct with minors is grounds for immediate termination of employment and the appropriate authorities will be notified.

How does the Diocese ensure compliance with these policies?

The Diocese and all its parishes and Catholic Schools participate in an annual compliance audit by an outside agency to ensure all procedures are strictly adhered. Diocesan and Catholic School Leaders regularly monitor the progress of continued education and training of all employees to ensure the *Keeping Children Safe* curriculum is implemented with fidelity.

Where can I find additional information on the policies and procedures in our Catholic schools related to child protection?

The Diocesan website provides information on creating a safe environment and reporting sexual abuse, <https://dioknox.org/creating-a-safe-environment/>. In addition, our schools strive to maintain open and transparent communication with all stakeholders within their communities. It is always recommended to bring any concerns directly to your child's principal/president or classroom teacher.

Concluding comments . . .

In the words of Pope Francis, "caring for our little ones and for our elders is a choice of civilization. And also for the future, because the little ones, the children, the young people will carry society forward by their strength, their youth, and the elderly people will carry it forward by their wisdom, their memory, which they must give to use all." (10.25/130).

The Catholic Schools in the Diocese of Knoxville are committed to protect the children entrusted in their care and to ensure their educational ministry is founded on faith and intellectual wisdom.