



Procedure for Safe Environment Presentations in Catholic Schools & Parish Religious Education Programs

The United States Catholic Bishops have mandated that all Catholic schools, youth programs and religious education programs offer “safe environment” presentations designed to help educate our young people with respect to safe environments and how to protect themselves against physical, emotional and sexual abuse. To comply with this mandate in the Diocese of Great Falls-Billings, these instructional presentations must be provided to all Preschool – Grade 12 students on a yearly basis. Once these presentations have been completed, the safe environment forms and materials identified and explained in this mailing must be submitted to the appropriate diocesan office **NO LATER THAN APRIL 15, 2010**, as follows:

Parish Religious Education Programs

Mr. Anthony Allen
Office of Catechesis and Youth Ministry
121 23rd Street South
Great Falls, MT 59401

Catholic Schools

Mr. Harry Plummer
Superintendent of Catholic Schools
121 23rd Street South
Great Falls, MT 59401

For your convenience, all approved safe environment forms/materials are being placed on our diocesan website under the tab, “Protecting God’s Children” (www.dioceseofgfb.org).

PROCEDURE:

The following is an overview of the entire procedure as it is to be implemented in the Diocese of Great Falls-Billings:

1. Annual Parent Orientation and the Initial Parent Letter

An explanation of the safe environment program’s rationale should be included in the annual parent orientation session(s) that take place at the beginning of each year for schools and parish religious education programs. In explaining the program, emphasis should be placed on its value as a service to the parents in helping children and youth understand how to protect themselves against physical, emotional and sexual abuse.

As a follow-up to this introduction to the safe environment program, all parents must receive a letter from the school or parish about it far enough in advance of the presentations to permit parents to review the safe environment instructional materials prior to the scheduled presentation date(s). This letter should contain:

- a brief statement of the program’s purpose;
- the date and time of the scheduled instruction;
- an invitation for the parents to review the materials prior to that date; and



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- a statement that parents have the right to “opt-out” of having their child/children attend the presentations; however, if they chose this option, the letter must indicate that they are to complete the “Parent Opt-Out” form and send it to the school/parish in advance of the presentation date(s).

An example letter for parents entitled, “Safe-Environment Intro Parent Letter” has been attached for your review and modification. As with the other safe environment forms/materials, this example letter will be available for your review and/or downloading at our diocesan website (see above).

2. Requirements Concerning the Instructional Material

The Diocese of Great Falls-Billings has purchased a variety of video resources that are available for parishes and schools to check out and use in their safe environment presentations. Parishes and schools are also encouraged to purchase their own materials when possible. A list of these diocesan-approved resources is enclosed in this mailing.

Some parishes and schools choose to develop their own presentations instead of using those identified on the attached list of resources. ***Should your parish or school choose this option, the proposed instructional materials for these presentations must be sent to Anthony Allen (for parishes) or Harry Plummer (for schools) prior to their use for review and approval.***

A list of recommended teaching points to be included in presentations developed by an approved teacher, catechist or facilitator entitled, “Key Discussion Components” for grades PreK-6 and Middle - High School have been attached.

3. The Need for 100% Accountability

Every student in your parish religious education program or school must be accounted for in this process. If a student misses a safe environment presentation due to absence, he/she must be given an opportunity to participate in a make up session. Parents are the primary educators of their children and, as such, they may choose to decline the opportunity for their children to participate in safe environment presentations. If they choose not to have their children participate, they are to complete the “Parent Opt-Out Form” (attached) and return it to the parish or school. If repeated attempts to obtain a signed opt-out form from parents prove unsuccessful and their children do not participate in the scheduled sessions, the parish or school’s designated representative needs to fill out and submit an opt-out form for each of these families with the names of all the students from those families who did not participate.



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4. Required Letter to Parents Opting Out

The designated parish or school representative needs to send the “Letter to Parents Choosing to Opt-Out of Safe Environment Presentations” (example attached) to the parents of all students that do not attend the presentations, whether or not they submitted the opt-out form. This letter must be placed on parish or school letterhead **and have the parent’s mailing address on the letter**. Copies of these letters must be attached to the Children’s Safe Environment Tracking Form.

5. Submitting the Children’s Safe Environment Tracking Form and Attachments

Parishes and schools may submit the Children’s Safe Environment Tracking Form and attachments as soon as they complete the presentations, **but NO LATER THAN April 15, 2010**. Your submission must contain the following:

- All opt-out forms signed by parents (or signed by the school representative if parents do not respond to requests for them to return the opt-out form). **Remember: The combined total of students recorded as being present at the presentations AND the number of those recorded as opting out must equal your total school or religious education program student enrollment number.**
- A copy of the letter sent to parents choosing to opt-out and offering them the safe environment training materials to be used at home (see above reference to the “Letter to Parents Choosing to Opt-Out of Safe Environment Presentations”). Any parents failing to respond to attempts to obtain a signed opt-out form and whose children do not participate in the scheduled sessions are to have this letter mailed to them.

Thank you for your help in meeting the requirements of this USCCB mandate. If you have questions or concerns related to the implementation of any part of the safe environment process, contact Harry Plummer for Catholic schools or Anthony Allen for parish religious education programs.

Attachments

- Sample Letter – “Safe Environment Intro Parent Letter”
- Diocesan-approved video resources
- Recommended Teaching Points – Pre-K thru Grade 6
- Recommended Teaching Points – Middle thru High School
- “Parent Opt-Out Form”
- Sample – “Letter to Parents Choosing to Opt-Out of Safe Environment Presentations”
- Children’s Safe Environment Tracking Form