

Safe *Environments* refers to environments that are created and maintained in an effort to provide children, young people, ministers, and other people with the safest possible place in which to minister, study, and work.

The Diocese of Norwich and its parishes, schools, and other affiliated institutions is committed to providing safe environments for children, young people, and adults.

To assist in creating and maintaining safe environments, Bishop Michael R. Cote has established the Office for Safe Environments. The responsibilities of this office include overseeing the creation and implementation of safe environments programs and policies. In the Diocese of Norwich, there are six components to the safe environments programs and policies:

1. Awareness and Education

In creating any safe environment, awareness and education are essential. The Diocese has chosen the Praesidium programs *Armatus* online and *Called to Protect* as two of the avenues for raising awareness regarding the issue of child sexual abuse and how to prevent it. *Called to Protect* is a video-based and discussion-oriented program, and *Armatus* is online training. Both of these programs provide a foundational understanding of the risks, warning signs, and appropriate responses to child sexual abuse. It also discusses preventive strategies and how to implement them.

All priests, deacons, ministry leaders, and employees and volunteers who interact with children and teenagers on a regular

basis have an obligation to attend this program.

In addition to these two programs, the Diocese has embarked upon several initiatives to raise awareness and increase education in regard to safe environments. These initiatives include:

- the writing and distribution of pamphlets, bulletin inserts, and other educational materials;
- articles in the *Four County Catholic*;
- postings on the diocesan website (www.norwichdiocese.org);
- other programs and forums determined by the Office for Safe Environments.

2. The Pastoral Code of Conduct

The *Pastoral Code of Conduct* is a set of guidelines for all Catholics to follow in creating and maintaining safe environments. It also includes provisions for addressing a lack of compliance with the *Pastoral Code of Conduct* and referrals in how to report sexual misconduct.

3. Electronics Communication and Computer Use Policy

The proper relationship between adults and minors can easily become confused because of the easy, informal, and at times **anonymous nature** of many forms of electronic communication. Adults must make sure that their use of electronic communication maintains a **proper professional relationship** with minors, and

does not create or give the appearance of an inappropriate relationship, or encourage inappropriate behavior. In using electronic communications, **proper and healthy boundaries** between adults and minors must always be maintained.

4. Comprehensive Screening

Comprehensive screening refers to the screening process for employees, volunteers, and contractors affiliated with the Diocese of Norwich. It includes:

- a written application form with signed statement by the employee, volunteer, or contractor;
- checks of references listed on an application form;
- a personal interview with employee, contractor, or volunteer;
- observations of the person's conduct;
- a criminal background check of the contractor, volunteer, or employee.

5. Sexual Misconduct Policy

The *Sexual Misconduct Policy* of the Diocese of Norwich addresses child sexual abuse and other issues of sexual misconduct by priests, deacons, employees, volunteers, and contractors of the Diocese of Norwich. It describes how to report allegations of sexual misconduct and how the Diocese will respond to allegations. This policy complies with the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*, which was drafted by the United State Conference of Catholic Bishops in June of 2002.

6. Practical Matters and Other Concerns

This component addresses practical matters that arise during awareness and education sessions and the implementation of comprehensive screening, the *Pastoral Code of Conduct*, and other safe environments measures. Practical matters and concerns include such things as safe environments conditions of usage for the use of parish facilities by people outside of the parish and resolving conflicts between diocesan safe environments policies and other professional codes of ethics and conduct.

Your help is needed!

Creating and maintaining safe environments for children and young people is not the responsibility of one or two people. Each and every person can assist in providing safe environments for all of God's children. In fact, for these initiatives to be truly successful, we need the help and assistance of all Catholics. To find out how you can help in creating and maintaining safe environments for all of God's children, contact your local parish, school, or Catholic institution or contact the Office for Safe Environments.



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SAFE ENVIRONMENTS IN THE DIOCESE OF NORWICH



"Let the children come to me and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." Mark 10:14

Diocese of Norwich