



# Honor Thy Children

Archdiocese of Louisville continuing education for the awareness and prevention of child abuse

## DON'T WAIT ON SAFE ENVIRONMENT

When it comes to safe environment training, waiting until the last minute is not the best practice. For anyone working with (or thinking about working with children), it's a requirement mandated by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops approved the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People. Safe Environment isn't just about rules; it's about empowerment, awareness, and the ability to act when it matters most. Whether it's at home, during the school day, or after school on the playing field, by recognizing child abuse, we commit to a future where children feel safe, valued, and empowered to thrive. The Archdiocese of Louisville's Safe Environment Training equips individuals with critical skills to identify

child sexual abuse, prevent future incidents, and respond appropriately in critical situations. Procrastinating not only



jeopardizes your safety but also the well-being of those around you. By attending early you ensure you're ready for the unexpected. It will build your confidence, sharpen your decision-making, and empower you to act in an unexpected situation. Don't wait until a close call or a preventable tragedy puts you in a position to act. Make safe environment training a priority — because when it comes to child abuse, being prepared isn't optional; it's vital.

Additionally, January and February tend to be our biggest months for inclement weather. If a training is cancelled every attempt will be

made to reschedule as soon as possible, but they are subject to facility and

trainer availability. The rescheduled training, may not always align with your commitment (s). By attending a training at your earliest you ensure this portion of your compliance. Should a training be canceled, notice will immediately be sent to your parish/school Safe Environment Coordinator, school principal, and parish bookkeeper requesting it be sent to parish/school families and their members. It will also be posted on [www.archlou.org/safe](http://www.archlou.org/safe).

Archdiocese of Louisville

November/  
December 2024

If you need support or someone to talk to:

- ☺ Prevent Child Abuse Kentucky or Indiana: 800.CHILDREN/800.422.4453 [www.pcaky.org](http://www.pcaky.org) [www.pcaain.org](http://www.pcaain.org)
- ☺ Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline 800.4.A.CHILD 800.422.4453 [www.childhelp.org](http://www.childhelp.org)

### Are You Safe Environment Compliant?

Are you working regularly with children?

If so you must have attended an Archdiocese of Louisville Safe Environment Training.

Has it been 5 years since your initial in person training? You must complete your 5 year refresher training

You must also have a satisfactory background check not older than 5 years.

See your Safe Environment Coordinator today to verify your compliance!

## COMPLIANCE IS

- Initial attendance at an Archdiocese of Louisville in-person training
- Archdiocese of Louisville issued background check, not older than five years
- Five year refresher training either online or in person. **(You cannot take the online training until you've completed the in-person initial training)**

# PROTECTING FROM ABUSE DURING THE HOLIDAYS

The holiday season is a time of joy, togetherness, and celebration. Families gather, friends reconnect, and cherished traditions take center stage. However, it's also

crucial to recognize that large gatherings can present risks for children, particularly when it comes to their safety. Amidst the bustle, ensuring children are safe and protected

from potential abuse should be a top priority. Below are some ways families can create a secure environment during holiday festivities.

## HOLIDAY GATHERING SAFETY

**Set Clear Boundaries.** Teach children about their right to personal space and body autonomy. They should know that they don't have to hug, kiss, or show physical affection to anyone if they feel uncomfortable—even if they're a close relative. Practice phrases like, "How about a high-five?" or "Let's wave instead." Let other adults know your family's rules regarding physical interactions with your children. A gentle reminder can help create a culture of respect and understanding.

**Maintain Supervision** - Large gatherings often mean adults are busy cooking, catching up, or managing event logistics. This can leave children unattended in unfamiliar spaces or with individuals they don't know well. Assign a trusted adult or older teen to actively supervise children during these times. Encourage group activities in open, communal areas rather than isolated spaces. This ensures that children are visible and less likely to be in vulnerable situations.

**Teach Kids to Recognize Unsafe Behavior** - Empower your children by teaching them to recognize inappropriate or unsafe behavior. Use age-appropriate language to explain what is and isn't acceptable. Encourage them to speak up if they feel uncomfortable and to know that they won't be in trouble for telling you. Establish a "code word" they can use to signal they need help or want to leave a situation discreetly.

**Trust Your Instincts** - If you feel uneasy about someone's behavior or attitude toward your child, trust your instincts and take action. It's better to address concerns early than to regret inaction later. Be vigilant if someone seems overly interested in being alone with children or is excessively affectionate in ways that seem inappropriate.

**Educate Extended Family Members** - Sometimes, abuse stems from ignorance rather than malice. Older family members may not understand modern approaches to child safety and boundaries. Have a gentle, proactive discussion about your family's values and the importance of creating a safe environment for all children.

*The holidays should be a time of warmth and joy, not fear or discomfort. By being proactive and intentional, parents and guardians can ensure that children are not only safe but also feel secure and valued. With clear communication, vigilance, and education, we can all contribute to making holiday gatherings a positive and safe experience for everyone. Remember, creating a safe environment is everyone's responsibility—and it starts with awareness and action.*



## UPCOMING SAFE ENVIRONMENT TRAININGS

The initial round of spring Safe Environment Training sessions are set. These important training sessions are designed to promote a safe, respectful, and inclusive environment for all—this training, along with an Archdiocese of Louisville-issued background check, is mandatory for anyone working with children. Even if you think you will be working with children in the future, but are unsure, you're strongly encouraged to take advantage of these upcoming sessions.

All trainings begin promptly at 630p and **children under 16 will not be admitted given the content discussion.**

1.7.25  
Flaget Center

1.13.25  
St. Joseph (Bardstown)

1.21.25  
St. Agnes  
(Parish Center located behind the school)

1.27.25  
St. Margaret Mary

Additional trainings are being scheduled for February, March, and April, but again, it's best not to put off attendance as inclement weather could result in postponements.

If you're unsure of your compliance, please see your parish/school Safe Environment Coordinator.

# RESPONDING WHEN A CHILD DISCLOSES

It is highly unlikely for children to make false allegations of sexual abuse. Therefore, when a child reports incidences of abuse or other suspicious behavior, we should presume the child is telling the truth. Children are more likely to report abuse when they know their telling will lead to protection.

In some cases, the abuse cannot be substantiated. An unsubstantiated disclosure does not mean that the child is being untruthful. Rather, it means that there is not enough collaborating evidence to support the child's story. Recanting is also predictable when a child discloses. Some children recant their disclosures when parents get upset, police are called, crisis escalates, or loss occurs. It is eerie for a child when the things occur that the abuser foretold, which can prompt the child to recant. When dealing with a child who has purposefully disclosed, respond by being honest and direct. Acknowledge the child's courage in disclosing and ask what it is he or she hopes will happen. Provide the child with as much information as possible and allow the child some age appropriate choices about the process. Choices might include allowing the child to be present when the report to authorities is made or in the case of an older child, allowing the child to make the report. These choices empower the child and allow for some control of the situation. Assure the child that he or she is not to blame, and that the abuse and its

consequences are the fault of the abuser, not the child.

Children who disclose often begin by testing you. They share parts of their story without giving all the details. It is not your job to investigate or substantiate what happened. Rather your response- ability is to make a report to those who are trained to decide whether or not to investigate. Details of the abuse are not necessary in making a report. Praise the child's courage for telling you and explain that you will do your best to protect him or her. Do not, however, make promises that you cannot keep.

Be open and invite the child's disclosure through active listening. This is made difficult by the atrocity of what the child is claiming. Know that children who have been sexually abused often assume that they will be blamed for the abuse. Children who have been abused are skilled at watching others in assessing danger. This ability to "read" others protects them amidst the dynamics of abuse. These skills are readily employed in threatening situations where the child may be vulnerable. Consequently, a child who has been abused may be hesitant to tell you what has occurred. If you respond with horror or anger to what is being said, you are unwittingly causing the child to feel ashamed and fearful. Children respond to this type of reaction by self-censoring. Therefore, do all you can to maintain your poise as the child tells you what happened.

Ask open-ended questions, which allows the child to tell you what he or she needs to say without you leading.

For your purposes, whatever the child shares is enough for the time being. Try to refrain from asking clarifying questions that probe and interrogate. And never ask leading questions such as, "How did you try to stop your abuser from touching you?"

Children who are being violated may not view it as "abuse." What they do know is that what they are experiencing does not feel right, or is confusing, or "icky." They may hesitate at labeling it as abuse, particularly if the abuser is a parent, other family member, or a close family friend who is well respected and trusted. Therefore, use language that describes what they experience in their terms such as "yucky touches," or "something that made you feel weird."

Answer the child's questions to the best of your ability and be honest in your responses. If you do not know something, say so. Make sure you communicate that you believe the child. You may experience doubt but know that if a child is disclosing sexual abuse, something must be wrong and/or troubling.

Actively support the child and praise his or her strength and courage in disclosing. Emphasize that the child did nothing to deserve what occurred and that telling you was the right thing to do. You may be asked a question such as, "what did I do to deserve this?" Whenever you hear this concern, tell the child that he or she

did nothing to deserve being abused, and that it is hard to understand why people do these things to children.

When making the report to Child Protective Services, have the child present if possible. This offers the child a sense of control and apprises him or her of the steps that are being taken. If the child is a pre-teen or teen, he or she may opt to make the report personally, which provides a sense of control over what is happening—a necessary part of the healing process.

## Safe Environment Coordinator

Each parish/school is required to have an appointed Safe Environment Coordinator that can verify your compliance and answer any questions.

If you don't know who that is contact

Scott Fitzgerald  
Archdiocese of  
Louisville Coordinator of  
Safe Environment  
Services  
(sfitzgerald@archlou.org)  
502.471.2132

He will be able to put you in touch with your coordinator





**Archdiocese of Louisville  
Office of Safe Environment**

Martine Bacci Siegel, MSN, RN, CNS  
Maloney Center  
1200 South Shelby Street  
Louisville, KY 40220

Phone: 502.636.1044  
Fax: 502.634.3381  
E-mail: [msiegel@archlou.org](mailto:msiegel@archlou.org)

No child or adult should ever experience abuse by anyone, especially a church minister. We all have the right to be treated with dignity and to expect our church to reflect the goodness of God in all of its dealings.

We hope that this information is helpful to all in our communities who are working to prevent and respond to childhood sexual abuse. Please let us know if you need further assistance or information by calling or emailing our victim assistance coordinator, Ms. Martine Siegel, at 502/636-1044; [victimassistance@archlou.org](mailto:victimassistance@archlou.org)

We must heed God's call to care for the most vulnerable among us and to continue our efforts toward wholeness and health in dealing with sexual abuse.

# THERE IS SUPPORT AVAILABLE

## **Archdiocese of Louisville Counseling Referral Services (Family Ministries Office)**

Provides services and assistance through the Victim Assistance Coordinator to those who report that they have been abused by a Church employee ([victimassistance@archlou.org](mailto:victimassistance@archlou.org)); provides counseling referrals to individuals, couples, and families; and coordinates safe environment programming for the Archdiocese ([safe@archlou.org](mailto:safe@archlou.org)). [www.ArchLou.org/Family](http://www.ArchLou.org/Family)

**Martine Siegel ([msiegel@archlou.org](mailto:msiegel@archlou.org))**  
Victim Assistance Coordinator 502.636.1044  
Counseling Referrals  
Safe Environment Coordinator

## **NAMI - The National Alliance on Mental Illness - 502.588.2008**

Offers support to individuals suffering from mental illness and their families. This may include abuse, PTSD, anxiety, and depression. Services include support groups for the community as well as education. [www.namilouisville.org](http://www.namilouisville.org)

## **Spalding University - Center for Behavioral Health - 502.873.4472**

Offers counseling & psychological testing services to adults, teens, and children. ([behavioralhealth.spalding.edu](http://behavioralhealth.spalding.edu))

## **The Couch Immediate Health Center - 502.414.4557**

Complete mental health services by walk-in or appointment and offering counseling and/or medication when appropriate. [www.thecouchimmediatementalhealthcare.com](http://www.thecouchimmediatementalhealthcare.com)

## **Silverleaf Sexual Trauma Recovery Services - 270.234.9236**

Provides services to victims of sexual abuse and rape, as well as to non-offending caregivers and families. Serving Breckinridge, Grayson, Hardin, Larue, Marion, Meade, Nelson, and Washington counties. [www.sliverleafky.org](http://www.sliverleafky.org)



**Remember, in Kentucky all who know or suspect that a child (under age 18) is being abused are required by statute to report such abuse to the statewide hotline at 1-877-KYSAFE1 (1-877-597-2331) or to the county in which the abuse has taken place.**