

<p style="text-align: center;">Safe Environment for Children Sexual Abuse Awareness Training – Instructional Component</p>

Policy

The Diocese of Buffalo requires all parish religious education programs and Catholic elementary and high schools to provide sexual abuse awareness training for children as mandated by the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in 2002.

This training must occur annually in every age group/grade. Serious consideration should be given to the scheduling of the training so as to maximize the benefit of maintaining a safe environment for children. All questions about this policy should be directed to the Diocesan Department of Lifelong Faith Formation at 716- 847-5505.

N.Y.S. public schools and our Catholic schools are mandated to follow the NYS Standards for Health Education. In addition, the Diocesan Human Growth and Development Curriculum which is part of our Diocesan Religion Curriculum is also implemented in schools and religious education/parish programs. Sexual abuse awareness and prevention is a part of these standards and would only enhance what our children are already learning in the context of our faith formation.

By March 15 of each year, schools and religious education/parish programs are to notify the Department of Lifelong Faith Formation of the number of children enrolled in the school/religious education/parish program, the number who participated in the sexual abuse awareness training, and the date the program was presented. The form is located on the Department of Lifelong Faith Formation's website www.officeoflifelongfaithformation.org or call 716-847-5505.

Parents

Parents of school-age children must be notified prior to their child/children participating in sexual abuse awareness. They must be informed of the right not to have their child/children participate. A sample letter is available with an exemption request/permission form. All exemption requests must be kept on file in the parish/school. A copy of the age appropriate lesson plan is to be included with the notification letter or made available for review in a convenient location/time.

Handling Parental Objections

The Diocese of Buffalo recommends that you listen to your students' parents and seek a sensitive approach to hearing their concerns. Be able to delineate the difference between sexual abuse awareness training and 'sex education'. Review the lesson plans with them. It is important to remind them that this training is mandated by the U.S. Bishops in the 2002 *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*, and is not negotiable. They are within their rights to exempt their children from this session but must sign the "opt-out" form.

The form can be found on the Department of Lifelong Faith Formation's website www.officeoflifelongfaithformation.org or call 716-847-5505.

Frequently asked questions:

With all the demands of a typical religious education curriculum, how can this education for sexual abuse awareness be included?

The sample lesson plans run under one hour. This allows for easy adaptability into the existing religious education calendar. In order to meet the mandates of the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* regarding the education of children and teens on this subject, attention should be given to the most effective placement of these lesson plans, this includes integrating them into already planned sessions that address the *Diocesan Religion Curriculum*.

Our Catholic Schools follow the NYS Standards for Health Education and therefore should consider implementing this program as a supplement to these standards.

In what different ways could parishes and schools integrate this education for Sexual Abuse Awareness for Children and Youth into their program calendar? (Choose one).

Religious Education Programs (Implementation ideas):

1. Choose one regular religious education session when all groups will cover this material.
2. Add a special session to your calendar.
3. Integrate it into sessions with your regular religion curriculum.
4. Plan a Saturday or Sunday retreat module for all children/youth or for designated groups.
5. Plan a special family education session that is part of your religious education calendar (invite parents).

Catholic Schools (Implementation ideas):

1. Select one day when this session will be conducted throughout the school.
2. Integrate it into the religion curriculum.
3. Hold age group assemblies on the subject.
4. Plan a special family session (invite parents).

What times of year are appropriate for Sexual Abuse Awareness education programs?

We already realize that this training must be offered **annually**. It's just a natural part of what we owe our students. For most lessons, an appropriate time would be in October during *Respect Life* month and when we instruct students about safety on Halloween, or during the liturgical year when Scripture stories are conducive.

In following our religion curriculum, this element fits right into the beginning of the year: Gr. 1 has right in the beginning 'God wants me to be happy' (what a perfect and natural place for saying "No" to those who make me feel uncomfortable). Gr. 4 teaches about Jesus as our example with the Commandments, Beatitudes, etc. (what a perfect place to talk about 'stranger danger' and unsafe situations). And so on.... through our diocesan religion curriculum. These lessons have to become part and parcel of our scheduling and lesson planning. For your benefit, a sample lesson plan has been revised for each of the following age groups: 5-7, 8-10, 11-13, and 14-17. These are to be utilized or adapted so that the **learning objective** for each age group is met. Various resources and videos are available through the Catholic Center library (716-847-8778) or through the internet. (The revised lesson plans and resources are on our website: www.officeoflifelongfaithformation.org.) Any questions or concerns should be directed to the Department of Lifelong Faith Formation at 716-847-5505.

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