

# Creating a Safe Environment For Our Children

## Catholic Diocese of Jackson

### Introduction:

It is important that all diocesan personnel be informed about the **Protection of Children-Diocese of Jackson** Document, its various components on the prevention of child abuse and procedures that are followed when reports of child abuse or sexual misconduct by Church personnel are received. In addition, this document provides information on other procedures to promote a safe environment for youth in our schools, parishes and other diocesan sponsored programs. For the purpose of this document, all regulations applying to children also apply to vulnerable adults.

### Purpose:

The Catholic Diocese of Jackson has a program to reduce the risk of child abuse in order:

- To provide a safe and secure environment for the children and youth in faith communities of the Jackson Diocese.
- To provide a screening process for all employees and volunteers working with children and youth.
- To assist the Diocese in evaluating a person's suitability to work with children and youth.
- To provide an annual catechesis on gospel values and self protection skills for all school age children.
- To provide a system to respond to the victims and their families, as well as the accused.
- To reduce the possibility of false accusations against clergy, employees, volunteers and contract workers.

### Definitions:

For the purpose of this document only:

**Sexual Abuse of a minor** means any form of injury or abuse of a sexual nature that is to the detriment of a child's physical, moral, mental or spiritual well being.

**Sexual misconduct** means any form of sexual conduct that is unlawful; that is contrary to the moral instructions, doctrines, and canon law of the Catholic Church, and causes injury to another. It may constitute either/or sexual abuse, sexual harassment or sexual exploitation.

**Diocese** means the Roman Catholic Diocese of Jackson, including but not limited to parishes, schools, agencies, and institutions with direct accountability to the Bishop of Jackson.

**Church Personnel** means any priest, religious, employee or significant volunteer working in or on behalf of the Jackson Diocese.

**Adult Supervisor** means anyone 21 years of age or older.

**Children** means all persons under the age of eighteen.

**Vulnerable adult** means any person 18 years of age or older who is unable to protect his or her own rights, interests, and/or vital concerns and who cannot seek help without assistance because of a physical, mental or emotional impairment.

**Significant Volunteer** is an unpaid person entrusted with the care and supervision of children: 1) in a diocesan or parish activity two or more times in a year, or 2) on any overnight trip or retreat.

**Youth Assistant** is a volunteer between the ages of 18-20 and whose volunteer efforts must be supervised by an adult who is compliant with all aspects of the Protection of Children Policy.

**Contract worker** means any person who is not covered under the definition of Church Personnel, but may be a worker who regularly interacts with children by providing a service under a separate contract.

## Screening Procedures

The following screening procedures are to be used with clergy, religious, staff and volunteers who work with children, youth, or vulnerable adults. All collected information is to be treated as confidential.

**Catholic Diocese of Jackson Application for Employees and Volunteers:** All clergy and religious must complete this form. Staff and significant volunteers who have regular contact with children must complete this form as well. See definition of significant volunteer above.

All sections within the application form must be completed fully unless the statement at the beginning of the box applies to the applicant. Please note that an additional form is required when applying for a **teaching** position in a Catholic School.

Upon completion of this form, the employee or volunteer will be provided with a copy of the Protection of Children policy and other protection of children materials. He or she must sign a form acknowledging receipt of the policy.

**Significant Volunteers applying for a volunteer position:** It is recommended that those applying for volunteer positions in a parish must have attended the parish for at least three years and be reasonably well known by parish leaders, unless a recommendation is obtained from the volunteer's former parish/church indicating their suitability for the volunteer ministry.

**Contract Workers:** Before a contract worker who has significant contact with youth may provide services to a parish, school or diocesan sponsored program or activity, he or she must complete the diocesan criminal background screenings or must have completed a comparable screening process by the contracting entity.

**Drivers:** A motor vehicle record check must be obtained on all drivers who transport youth. The motor vehicle record check must be repeated every five years. Only adult drivers who do not have any DUI's within the last seven years and who do not have more than two moving violations within the last five years may be used.

**Confidentiality:** All personal information obtained through the following sources should be kept confidential: The Catholic Diocese of Jackson Application for Employees and Volunteers, reference information, interview, criminal background check, etc. It is recommended that all material be kept in a locked file cabinet and access to it be restricted to those who have a "need to know". These materials should be destroyed, that is shredded, ten years after an individual's employment is terminated or the volunteer ceases his/her volunteer duties.

## **Training Procedures**

Each school, parish and other diocesan sponsored program will provide both initial and ongoing training for staff and significant volunteers on providing a safe environment for children.

- A Protection of Children initial training is required within 60 days of employment/volunteer services. The applicant is provided a copy of the Protection of Children document. An acknowledgement form must be signed by the applicant indicating the policy has been read and they understand the policy before beginning a ministry.
- The safe environment review for all active employees/significant volunteers is required each odd number calendar year.

Educational materials on providing safe environments for children are available to church personnel as part of the Diocese's continuing education and training program.

## **Supervision Procedures**

In order to provide a safe environment for children, each school, parish or other diocesan sponsored program will provide adequate supervision for children entrusted to their care. They shall follow the following procedures:

- In the supervision of preschool children, have at least one adult female involved.
- Taking into consideration the age of youth and the type of activity, have an adequate number of male and/or female adults present at events involving children and youth.

- For events involving children or youth in higher risk settings, have two or more adults present.
- Release elementary age students only to a parent or legal guardian or someone designated by the parent or legal guardian.
- Obtain written parental permission, including a signed medical treatment form, before taking children or youth on trips. These forms should be kept for at least one year.
- Before permitting any minor to participate in athletic events or any other high risk activity, obtain parental approval.
- Whenever children or youth are out of direct visual contact of the adult supervisor, use a “buddy system”.
- For any overnight activities, all adult leadership and sponsors should be screened, trained and approved in advance by the appropriate pastor/school principal.

### **Behavioral Guidelines For Working With Children Or Youth**

All clergy, religious, staff and significant volunteers of the Diocese will observe the following guidelines for dealing with minors or vulnerable adults:

- Do not allow any minor to stay overnight in any Church rectory or other living quarters of priests unless they are an immediate family member or are accompanied by a parent or guardian.
- Do not provide minors with anything that is prohibited by law, such as alcohol, tobacco, drugs, etc.
- Do not sponsor church or school activities which do not comply with curfew laws for minors.
- Use caution and discretion in any physical contact with a minor. Try never to be alone with an individual youth, but if that does occur, try to avoid physical contact.
- Do not engage in physical discipline of a minor. Discipline problems should be handled in coordination with your supervisor and/or the parents of the minor.
- Do not be alone with a minor in a residence, sleeping facility, locker room, rest room, dressing facility, or other closed room or isolated area that is inappropriate to a ministry relationship.
- Do not take an overnight trip alone with a minor who is not a member of your immediate family.
- Do not sleep in the same bed with a minor. If an adult supervisor stays in a hotel or other sleeping room with a group of minors, the supervisor should sleep in his or her own bed using a roll away or cot if necessary.

- Topics, vocabulary, recordings, films, games or the use of computer software or any other form of personal interaction or entertainment that could not be used comfortably in the presence of parents should not be presented to minors. Sexually explicit or pornographic material is never appropriate.
- Do not administer medication of any kind, prescription or non-prescription without written parental permission. (Appropriate forms are in the appendices).
- If you recognize inappropriate personal or physical attraction developing between yourself and a minor, maintain clear professional boundaries between yourself and the minor. In the best case scenario, refer the minor to another adult supervisor ASAP.
- If one to one pastoral care of a minor should be necessary, avoid meeting in isolated environments. Schedule meetings at times and use locations that create accountability. Limit both the length and the number of sessions, and make appropriate referrals. Notify parents of meetings.
- Do not give minors keys to church facilities. If the minor has a key as a result of being a church employee or volunteer, the minor should be properly screened.
- Do not transport youth unless you have received prior authorization by the pastor/principal. See all screening requirements for “Drivers” on page 3.
- Do not take photographs of minors while they are unclothed or dressing.
- If you observe anyone, adult or minor, abusing a minor, take appropriate steps to immediately intervene and restore minor’s safety. Report the abuse to the civil authority in accord with diocesan policy and state law.

## **Disqualifying Offenses**

No person may serve with children or youth if he or she has:

- ever been convicted or received deferred adjudication for any disqualifying offense, or
- has presently pending criminal charges for any disqualifying offense. Each circumstance involving a criminal charge or conviction, including a plea of nolo contendere (no contest) may be appealed to the Vicar General and reviewed by the Review Committee.

Disqualifying offenses include but are not limited to:

1. A felony classified as an offense against a person or an offense against a family. Offenses against a person include, but are not limited to, murder, assault, sexual assault, and abandoning or endangering a child. Offenses against the family include, but are not limited to bigamy, incest, interference with child custody, enticing a child, and harboring a runaway child.
2. A felony classified as an offense against public order or indecency. Offenses against public order or indecency include, but are not limited to, prostitution, obscenity, sexual performance by a child, possession, or promotion of child pornography, and disorderly conduct.

3. A misdemeanor or felony involving sexual assault, lewd or indecent acts involving a child, injury to a child, abandoning or endangering a child, sexual performance by a child, possession or promoting child pornography, enticing a child, bigamy or incest.
4. A felony involving the possession or distribution of any substance defined as a “controlled substance” in the statutes of the State of Mississippi or some other state. If a conviction is more than seven years old, the circumstances of the conviction and sentencing may be reviewed by the Diocesan Review Committee. The committee may recommend to the Vicar General or Bishop that the person be allowed to serve with children and youth (In light of the effectiveness of using recovering addicts in substance abuse rehabilitation programs, upon approval of the Vicar General, employees or volunteers with controlled substance convictions may be allowed to work in such programs.)

At all times, the diocese reserves the right to include within the disqualifying offenses any and all additional offenses or conduct determined to be inconsistent with serving children, youth or other protected persons in the diocese.

## The Appeal Process

Any person who applies and is not accepted for employment or volunteer service or whose service as a member of the clergy, an employee or a significant volunteer is terminated for any reason under these guidelines, will have the right of appeal as set forth in the Appeal Process.

If non-acceptance is based on the criminal background check for clergy, employees and significant volunteers:

The applicant shall be given the name and address of the agency reporting the criminal history of the applicant, so that he or she will have the opportunity to obtain a similar report from such agency. In the event that such a report is obtained by the applicant and he or she reasonably believes an error has been made by the reporting agent, then, upon written request, a second criminal background check shall be obtained and the application reconsidered.

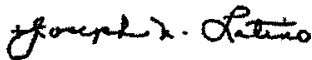
If non-acceptance is based upon the interview process for a significant volunteer:

The applicant, upon written request, shall have the right to have a second interview and to have his or her application reconsidered by the Review Committee within three months after the date of the non-acceptance.

## Conclusion

This document has been prepared in an effort to create a safe environment for our children and youth. As Catholics, we are called to participate intimately in sustaining God's creation by caring for our children and youth in the best way that we can. The Diocese of Jackson is committed to the well being of every child under its care. When children realize their potential and fulfill their dreams, the community as a whole flourishes and we are all enriched beyond measure. Our children deserve safe environments and as church we are committed to keeping our churches, schools and institutions safe environments.

Given at Jackson, Mississippi this the 16th day of July 2006.



Joseph N. Latino  
Bishop of Jackson



Reverend Elvin Sunds  
Chancellor - Vicar General