

In the case of field trips, a permission form is required as well as instructions concerning emergency care. The other case involves those who are qualified to enter into a formal and long-term counseling situation with a child. It is always preferred to obtain the permission of both parents for these situations. This same preference would hold in the case of parental separation.

### **When is it appropriate for me to meet alone with a child or teenager?**

It is advisable to try to avoid these situations as much as possible. If necessary however, a simple way to handle such a situation is to use the *other person nearby* rule. Inform a colleague or any other adult that you will be spending time with the child alone. Ask them to be nearby the open door to the room used for the meeting.

### **Is it alright to counsel a teenager in my home or in living quarters if the parents say it's O.K.?**

Even with parental permission, it is unwise for you to spend time alone in your home with an individual child for any reason. Use alternate sites, never meet alone with the child, and always use the "other person nearby" rule. (see above)

## Behavior

### **Does this policy forbid coaches and other adult supervisors from drinking alcohol (with other adults, of course) when away on overnight trips?**

Adults are never permitted to use alcohol while participating in youth activities during the time they are responsible for supervising youth.

### **What if a child or youth asks me for a ride home? What if the parents forgot to pick up a child and I'm the last one in the building?**

The following action is suggested. Have the child call home. If the parents cannot be reached, the adult would attempt to call the child's parent(s). If the parent cannot be reached, the child should be taken home and not left alone at the building. The child's physical protection takes precedence over strict adherence to the policy.

## Victim Assistance

### **To whom can I refer a child or minor who has been sexually abused?**

For immediate guidance, call the Pennsylvania State Hotline, *ChildLine* at **1-800-932-0313**

### **What about an adult who was abused as a child by a church employee? Who should they call? What help is available?**

Dr. Robert Nelsen is the Victim Assistance Coordinator for the Diocese of Erie. Dr. Nelsen, who is a Licensed Psychologist, works comprehensively and confidentially to assist victims in obtaining outpatient counseling, facilitate spiritual and mental health support services and maintain contact in order to insure that the counseling provided is helpful. He is also available to provide victims with valuable information and resources for promoting healing, stability and security.

Dr. Nelsen's phone number is **(814) 451-1521** and his e-mail address is [nelsen001@gannon.edu](mailto:nelsen001@gannon.edu)

You may also call:

Msgr. Edward Lohse 814-824-1131

Mrs. Cindy Zemcik 814-824-1195

## School Situations

### **Are high school students who are 18 yrs. old considered adults? Do they need clearances to participate in school activities with their younger peers?**

If the 18 yr. old student is considered a participant in the activity and not supervising any younger students, the 18 yr. old does not need clearances.

### **What about people who do not qualify as diocesan personnel but still work with the children, such as Title I and Act 89 personnel?**

These personnel would be cleared and trained by their own employer or agency. They do not have to sign diocesan compliance forms or be in-serviced by the diocese.

# Frequently Asked Questions about the Child Abuse Policy



**Roman Catholic  
Diocese of Erie**

## Introduction

Consider this: *1 of every 4 girls and 1 of every 6 boys* in this country have been abused by the time they are 18 years of age. These shocking figures cannot be ignored! In June of 2003, the Diocese of Erie amended its *Policy for the Protection of Children and Youth* and has revised the policy each year to remain current. Since the promulgation of the policy, one of the most frequently asked questions is: "These rules and regulations make no sense to me, a lot of needless work. What's the big deal?" The big deal is the safety and well-being of our children!

The Diocese of Erie is dedicated to providing a safe environment for all children and youth. Child abuse is not just a "church" problem. This tragedy is rampant in our society and as people of faith, we must take action to make a difference in the lives of children. This brochure answers some common questions regarding the diocesan policy for child protection. It is not intended to be all inclusive: please contact the diocesan Office for the Protection of Children and Youth (814-824-1195 or 814-824-1131) with further questions and concerns. Also, check the diocesan web page at [www.eriercd.org](http://www.eriercd.org) for more information.

## General

**Don't 'they' understand that it is nearly impossible to get volunteers as it is - how many more of these rules and regulations are we going to get before we just don't have anyone who will volunteer?**

The diocese understands that screening volunteers may make a difficult situation even more complex. It is hoped however, that potential volunteers will recognize the necessity for careful scrutiny and appreciate the concern for them and for our children which the Church demonstrates with this policy. The time when "just anyone" can volunteer is over.

**Where did all these rules come from?**

The diocesan *Policy for the Protection of Children* was written according to the mandates and norms put forth by the United State Conference of Catholic Bishops in their charter document, *Promise to Protect, Pledge to Heal*. The policy is also written to comply with the PA Public School Code and the PA Child Protective Services Law governing employees and volunteers who work with children/youth.

## Clearances, Screening and Training

**Who pays for clearances?**

Employees will pay for their own clearances. The two clearances required of volunteers, the *Pennsylvania State Police Criminal Record Check* and the *Pennsylvania Child Abuse History Certification*, are free of charge and can be completed online.

**Do my daughter and her friend need these background checks? They're both 19 years old. They do the Children's Liturgy of the Word during the 9:30 a.m. Sunday morning liturgy and are only with the children for twenty minutes.**

Yes. The two young ladies are adults according to the law and in contact with children. They will be spending enough time with the children to get to know them and build a relationship with them.

**Do adults working in a Vacation Bible School program need to get clearances?**

The answer is yes. Whether the volunteers are considered regular or occasional, they all need clearances to work with children.

**Are new employees and volunteers from other parishes required to apply for new background checks if they've already had them done?**

Employees and volunteers who are new to your parish must provide you with clearances that are less than five years old. If an employee applicant had their clearances run as a 'volunteer', the clearances are not acceptable for employment, no matter how current they are. The clearances must be repeated using the 'employee' designation.

**According to the policy, who receives training regarding child abuse and safe environment?**

All employees and volunteers who work with children must complete a diocesan online inservice every five years. All students in grades 1-12 in the schools and religious education programs are inserviced yearly on topics of safe environment. Information is made available to all parents yearly and bulletin announcements are utilized to inform the church community about safe environment practices.

**If the State Police Criminal Record check is returned with a "no record" result, could there be a record of child abuse history in the PA Dept. of Human Services records?**

Yes. The State Police clearance lists only cases that are criminally charged, or *founded* cases of child abuse. *Indicated cases* (discovered through physical evidence, admission, etc.) and not charged criminally will not show up in State Police records, but will show up in the Human Services records. The majority of cases of child abuse are *indicated*, so it is essential to do both clearances.

**If the State Police Criminal Record check is returned with the result that a person does have a record, does that mean the person cannot work with children?**

Not necessarily. A person could have a record with the State Police for crimes other than child abuse, such as shoplifting, that would not prohibit them from working with children. This is why it is necessary to submit the Child Abuse History Clearance to determine if the record is in fact for child abuse. Of course, depending on the nature of the crime, pastoral discretion should be exercised in allowing persons with criminal records to work with children.

**How long does a parish/school need to keep child protection records?**

Child Protection records should be kept indefinitely in a secure file. Child abuse cases often come to light 10-15 years after the abuse has occurred. Keeping records is good stewardship and provides investigators with information.

## Activities off school/church/agency premises

**When do I need to have the permission of a child's parents? Do both parents need to give their permission? What if the parents are separated?**

There are two situations where a child's (under the age of 18) parent's permission is required. The first involves any trip off of church/school/agency property.