

CLIFF NOTES

By Fr. Clifford Smith

Safe Environment Program for the Diocese of Dallas

Because of the gravely serious nature of the Sexual Abuse Crisis by Church personnel, it is important that all Catholics be informed about the policy on the prevention of the abuse of children and at-risk adults in order to promote a safe environment for schools and parishes.

As Christian adults, we have a moral and legal responsibility and are entrusted by God with the spiritual, emotional and physical well-being of children and vulnerable adults. As they participate in activities within or sponsored by our Parish, it is our responsibility and commitment to provide an environment, which is safe and nurturing.

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

- To provide a safe and secure environment for the children and youth in their faith communities.
- To assist the Diocese in evaluating a person's suitability to work with children, youth or the elderly.
- To satisfy the concerns of parents and staff members with a screening process.
- 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 and volunteers.
- To reduce the risk exposure of the parishes and the Catholic Diocese of Dallas.

Each school and parish should provide regular and ongoing safety training and **annual** update training to staff and all volunteer workers on safety issues. Volunteer means any unpaid person engaged in or involved in a Diocesan activity, and who is entrusted with the care and/or supervision of children, and/or persons engaged or involved in ministry who have regular individual contact with children or vulnerable adults as a function of their ministry or service.

Requirements for ***all*** clergy, staff, and volunteers:

Screening form: The release statement must be signed by the applicant to qualify for service. Volunteers should have attended the parish an adequate length of time to become well known by the other adults and leaders.

Reference Check: Complete a reference check from the references listed in Forms EMP and SCR. Maintain a written record of each reference check using Form REF.

Interview: Interview each new applicant using Form INT.

Criminal Background Check: Conduct a criminal background check on clergy, staff, and volunteers who work with children, youth, senior citizens or the developmentally disabled.

An initial training program is required for all clergy, staff and volunteers followed by an annual updating.