



Creating a Safe Environment **Steve Martinez, LCSW, LSOTP**

With the start of the new school and catechetical year, it is time to review what the Archdiocese of San Antonio is doing to create a safe environment within our parishes and Catholic schools. The Archdiocese wants every child and youth to be safe from harm within our community. The Archdiocese has made a commitment to correct mistakes that were made in the past by setting up a system that addresses adults, children and youth. The Safe Environment program consists of three parts; Criminal Background Checks, The Sexual Misconduct Policy, and the Safe Environment Training.

The first part of creating a safe environment is to conduct criminal background checks (CBC). The CBC is done to screen those who will be around our children and youth. The Archdiocese requires all clergy and employees to complete a CBC. It is also required that all volunteers who minister to children and youth, and volunteers who minister to vulnerable populations must complete a CBC. The volunteers that minister to children and youth include catechists, CYO coaches, youth ministers, youth choir directors, etc. Vulnerable populations include the homebound, sick, elderly, etc. CBC must be completed every three years.

The second part of creating a safe environment is the sexual misconduct policy and video. It is required that all employees, clergy, and volunteers must read the sexual misconduct policy and watch the sexual misconduct video. The sexual misconduct policy ensures that everyone who represents the Archdiocese of San Antonio has knowledge of its policies. The policy and corresponding video must be viewed at least once.

The last part of creating a safe environment within the Archdiocese is the training of adults, children, and youth on abuse prevention. It is required that all adults who minister to children must complete safe environment training. The training prepares the adult to identify abuse, report abuse, and to display appropriate boundaries around others. The adults must be trained every three years. Children and youth are the primary targets for the Archdiocesan Safe Environment Program. Children and youth enrolled in Catholic Schools and religious education classes receive abuse prevention training on a yearly basis. The Archdiocese uses two nationally recognized programs for education children and youth. Younger children learn about abuse prevention through songs and videos using the Yello Dyno program. It is an age appropriate way for children in pre-k through 4th grade to learn about abuse prevention. The youth learn through role playing and scenarios using the Child Lures Prevention Program. The Child Lures program focuses on how an offender attracts or lures a victim.

The Archdiocese of San Antonio will continue to do all it can to prevent abuse from occurring within parishes and schools. It takes an entire community to keep every child safe. To view the Safe Environment policies, just visit the Archdiocese of San Antonio's website at www.archsa.org. There the policies can be viewed as well as other information regarding abuse prevention.