

# FAQ: Safeguarding God's Children

*Frequently asked Questions about Safeguarding God's Children*

## ***What is Safeguarding God's Children?***

*Safeguarding God's Children* is a program designed to teach adults what they need to know to prevent sexual abuse. The premise of the program is that if every adult can protect one child, each one of us will change one life, and together we will make a difference in this generation of children.

## ***I don't understand why our church is asking us to do this. What does child abuse have to do with faith?***

*Safeguarding God's Children* and the accompanying policies is our way of responding to the culture we live within with godly respect for the "dignity of human nature... wonderfully created" by our God as stated in one of our collects. Our Baptismal Covenant calls us to seek and serve Christ in all persons, respecting the dignity of every human being. Abuse of any sort violates the dignity of human nature.

## ***Why do we need to take this new training?***

The first training program for child sexual abuse prevention training was developed in the early 1990s. Much has been learned since that time about how perpetrators groom their victims, the impact abuse has on the church and what types of safeguards can reduce the risk to children and churches. The new training covers these topics.

## ***Who has to take the training?***

Essentially all clergy, paid and volunteer church personnel whose work give them access to our buildings, all persons who supervise or assist with children and/or youth ministries, vestry members and others who have the authority to approve the creation of ministries, programs and activities for children and youth. For a full explanation see pp. 4-5 of the diocesan policies for a complete explanation.

## ***Where is the training offered?***

The training is offered by trained trainers at different locations throughout the Diocese. You can find out the dates, locations and how to register for upcoming trainings at either [www.diobeth.org](http://www.diobeth.org) or [www.diobethkid.org](http://www.diobethkid.org).

***What is the three hour specialized training in screening, selection and monitoring?***

The purpose of this training is to provide additional supports for those persons who administer the policies on a local basis. The training is still in development by the Episcopal Church and is not available at this time. Diocesan Council recognizes that parishes can not comply with this portion of the policy until the training becomes available. In the meantime, the Archdeacon is available to offer guidance regarding screening, selection and monitoring.

***How does the Diocese support parishes in carrying out the policies?***

The Diocese provides training opportunities throughout the year in both the northern and southern parts of the diocese for *Safeguarding God's Children*. The Diocese also provides background check, supplemental and sample forms to assist parishes in living into the policies and to help make parish record keeping simpler.

***What are the parish's responsibilities?***

**Training:** Parishes are responsible to make certain that individuals who are required to take the training according to the policies do so. Each parish needs to determine whether they will pay for those attending training or ask the individuals to do so.

**Backgrounds Checks:** Parishes are responsible to conduct background checks and keep appropriate files. Each parish needs to determine whether they will pay for background checks or ask the individuals to do so.

***Are background checks really necessary?***

Background checks are common place both in other non-profit organizations and in many work environments. Conducting background checks says that our church takes child abuse seriously. It also dissuades a perpetrator from applying for a position where he/she may have contact with children or youth. Background checks should be done with sensitivity. Each parish needs to determine what type of information would be of concern in working with children or youth.

***How soon does everyone need to complete their training?***

The policies require that training be updated every four years. If you took your last training prior to 2004, we recommend that you update your training within the coming year. Diocesan Council recognizes that it is going to take some time to live into the policies and trainings. With that in mind, we recommend training several members of your leadership over each of the next several years. We also investigating offering on-line training for the future.

***How do the policies apply to community staffed programs using our buildings?***

Ultimately we are responsible for what happens in our buildings regardless of who is using them. Many community organizations such as scout programs, day care centers and nursery schools already have guidelines and trainings in place through their parent organization or the state. They should be sufficient, however it is the responsibility of the vestry to make certain these are taking place. If one of these programs is run as an affiliate of the church and is considered a ministry or extension of the church then it is appropriate for the leadership of that organization to also participate in the training and agree to adhere to the policies.

***Why are keys a determining factor to who needs to take the training?***

Each parish is responsible for what happens in their buildings. Anyone who has a key to your building has access to your building at any time. They therefore have the capacity to bring someone into the building unsupervised. Abuse may take place when safeguards are not in place and we leave ourselves open to liability. Some parishes have taken creative approaches to those who have had keys in the past. They have a parishioner or staff person present to open and lock up after groups using their buildings or have installed a keyless entry system that keeps track of who is entering and leaving the building after hours through a electronic code system.

***How does the Diocese intend to make certain that the parishes of the Diocese are following the policies?***

The policies call for all vestry members to take the training. Vestry members are asked to annually acknowledge both the receipt of the policies and their willingness to comply with the policy's contents. Additionally each vestry is to submit to the Diocese whether they are adopting the Diocesan policies as their parish policies or adapting the policies to their local setting. If a vestry chooses to do the latter, they must submit their adapted policies to the Diocese for approval. Vestry acknowledgment forms are mailed to parishes annually with the parochial report. The Archdeacon will oversee this process.