

Office of Safe Environment



Diocese of Wheeling - Charleston

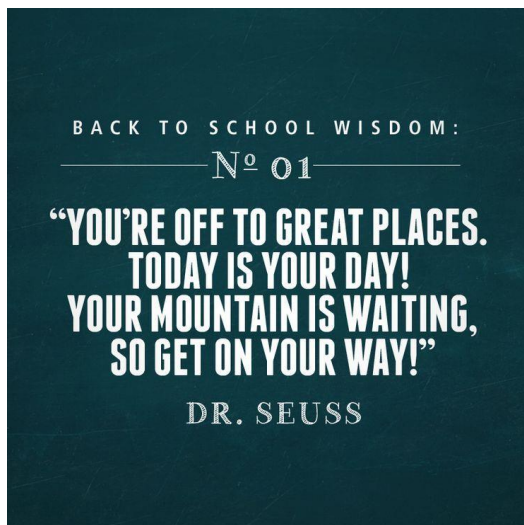
Fall 2016

A message from Sharon Goudy, Office of Safe Environment Coordinator

Greetings from the Office of Safe Environment ... here's hoping this finds you happy and relaxed after a nice, warm summer full of all good things. There's some great news to share from the Office of Safe Environment – the new Safe Environment software platform is up and running and in use in our parishes as I type this! Thank you to all throughout the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston for your patience and kindness as we have worked to implement this new tool over the past year. The new platform allows for instant access to assess the Safe Environment compliance status of volunteers and employees throughout the Diocese. It also allows for uniformity, consistency, secure storage, and the preservation of data for local level Safe Environment coordinators. Our Catholic schools and other programs and entities are expected to be up and running with the new platform by mid-September. Here's to saving time, becoming more organized, and making our parishes, schools, facilities, and programs even safer than they already were!

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) auditing agency will be conducting an on-site Safe Environment audit of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston on September 12-13. We look forward to welcoming the auditors and hearing their feedback as to how we are doing Safe Environment-wise.

Back to school is always an exciting time. Freshly-sharpened pencils. Crisp, white paper. Little (and big!) minds ready to learn and experience new things. As a life-long, avid reader, I couldn't wait to come home and smell my books on the first day of school. I love the smell of new books. The only thing I love even more is actually *reading* them! Below are some back-to-school words of wisdom from our friends at VIRTUS to raise your Safe Environment awareness as school resumes. Here's wishing everyone a safe, happy, and productive school year filled with wonder and joy.



By Paul Ashton, Psy.D., D.Min.

The best teachers teach from the heart, not from the book. —Author Unknown

The bittersweet time of year has returned: back-to-school—often bitter for kids and sometimes sweet for parents. During the summer months, there is always so much to do and so little time to do it. There are only so many weekends and, unfortunately, so few vacation days each year. Taking time to relish every moment is paramount. We all know that, but it is always easier to point it out to someone else than to heed our own good counsel. Life is like that.

Sometimes, we have to remind each other how important each of us really is and how much God loves us. That is what parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, teachers, and coaches do best. They remind others—especially the children in their lives—of their importance. Back-to-school time, like New Year's, is another time to recommit to being better at what each of us does best and to try harder at what we are not so good at doing.

Our VIRTUS® work is an example of what we all do well together. As we recommit to keeping children safe from abuse, neglect, bullying, and technological predators, it might be wise to review some of the myths and facts about our work. A quick glance at the facts below prompts us to remember our accomplishments protecting the children and vulnerable people in our homes, schools, playgrounds, athletic fields, and institutions.

Remember...

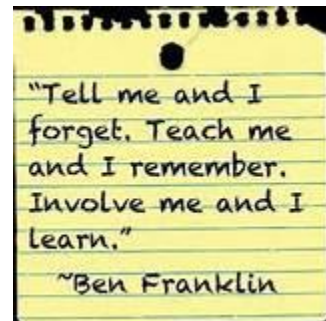
It is a myth that it's only abuse if it's violent. The fact is, physical abuse is just one type of child abuse. Neglect, emotional abuse, and bullying in school or via social media can be just as damaging. Because these types of abuse are subtler, other people are less likely to intervene.

It is a myth that only bad people abuse their children. The fact is while it's easy to say that only “bad people” abuse their children, it's not always so black and white. Not all abusers act in a “bad” manner in their everyday lives. Many people do good things to get closer to children and vulnerable persons.

It is a myth that child abuse doesn't happen in “good” families. The fact is, child abuse doesn't only happen in poor families or bad neighborhoods. It crosses all racial, economic, and cultural lines. Sometimes, families who appear to have it all from the outside are hiding a different story behind closed doors.

It is a myth that most child abusers are strangers. The fact is, while abuse by strangers happens, most abusers are family members or people who are close to the family.

It is a myth that abused children always grow up to be abusers. The fact is, some abused children repeat the cycle of abuse. On the other hand, many adult survivors of child abuse have a strong motivation to protect their children against what they went through and are excellent parents and caregivers (Adapted from Helpguide.org. 18 July 2012).



Our continued work together is crucial to break the cycle of abuse and lessen the scars that child sexual abuse, neglect, and bullying leave on victims. Educating children, believing them, and letting them know that they can discuss anything happening in their lives is something that all caregivers must practice often with the children and vulnerable adults in their lives. Together, we can—and must—change the future to improve victims’ sense of self-worth and increase their chances for success in healthy relationships, at home, school, and the workplace.

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Touching Safety

A Student Awareness Program has been implemented since the fall of 2005 to give children information (appropriate for their age levels) and skills to help recognize acceptable and unacceptable behaviors and how to effectively deal with those behaviors. This is a VIRTUS program called “**Touching Safety**”. The program is taught in Catholic schools and as part of Parish Schools of Religion. This program offers lesson plans for children in grades Kindergarten through 12.

If you are teaching Touching Safety, please recall that two lessons are taught each year. It is mandated that the first lesson be taught in the Fall (by the end of October). **The second lesson should be taught before the end of the school year.**

There is flexibility as to when the second lesson is taught, but the first lesson must be taught by the end of October.

Remember that Opt-Out Letters must be sent to parents at least two weeks in advance of teaching a lesson.

The “Touching Safety” lesson cycle for this year is:

School Year **2016-17** ... **CYCLE THREE** ... Lesson Five (by the end of October) and Lesson Six

A Message About Domestic Violence

Rev. Brian O'Donnell, SJ, visited the Office of Safe Environment recently with some very good information about the issue of domestic violence. Although the Office of Safe Environment’s mission encompasses sex abuse awareness, we thought it may be prudent in this instance to touch on the spectrum of abuse to include domestic violence.

If you haven't had the privilege of meeting him in person, Fr. O'Donnell is a member of the Society of Jesus and is involved in many important activities within the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston. The Society has missioned Fr. O'Donnell to the great state of West Virginia on three occasions, most recently starting in 2003. He holds a Ph.D. in History of Technology from M.I.T. and has taught at the University of Detroit Mercy and Wheeling Jesuit University. He serves as Executive Secretary of the Catholic Conference of West Virginia, which deals with the state legislature concerning social issues of interest to the Church and as Diocesan Director of the Department of Social Ministries. He also co-chairs the Peace and Justice Program Unit of the West Virginia Council of Churches. All of these assignments include a concern for the safety and health of all West Virginians.

In July and in conjunction with representatives from Catholic Charities of West Virginia, Fr. O'Donnell attended "Hope, Help, and Healing: A Catholic Response to Domestic Abuse and Violence" at The Catholic University of America in Washington, DC. In summary, the primary goals of the symposium included education, response, and prevention of domestic violence.

Outreach materials from the symposium show that in 2015, the National Domestic Violence Hotline documented 500 contacts from the state of West Virginia. West Virginia ranks 40th in terms of Hotline contact volume. Demographics show people of all ages and ethnicities call The Hotline. The Hotline provides crisis intervention; safety planning; referrals; and education for those who call in. Callers are reporting: emotional/verbal abuse (95%); physical abuse (71%); economic/financial abuse (19%); sexual abuse (8%); and digital abuse (5%). Commonly requested hotline services include: domestic violence shelters; legal advocacy/representation; counseling; and support groups. Calls are received from cities – large and small – all over the state.

It is the existence of The Hotline that motivated Fr. O'Donnell to visit the Office of Safe Environment and talk about raising awareness.

"Someone in your church or school is suffering from this, and there is help," Fr. O'Donnell said. "The Church overall realizes this is an issue. Just letting people know that they are not alone, and it can start with a phone call."

"A call to the hotline is the beginning of the process of getting help," Fr. O'Donnell said.

Intervention for teenagers may be especially important, he added, as such action may be integral to help break the cycle of domestic violence in its early stages.

Fr. O'Donnell will be working with the Office of Safe Environment to raise awareness for the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston's priests in October. The Diocese's priests regularly participate in Safe Environment refreshers, and this year, Fr. O'Donnell has been allotted some time to present the information he learned during the symposium. He believes that simply letting priests know about The Hotline and its services will help if their parishioners present with domestic violence issues.

"There is help out there, and it starts with just a simple phone call," Fr. O'Donnell said.

The National Domestic Violence Hotline number is 1.800.799.7233 and the web site is: www.thehotline.org.

Webinar on Domestic Violence (Oct. 26)

On Oct. 26 at 1 p.m. Eastern Standard Time (EST), Catholic Charities USA will sponsor a webinar, "Domestic Violence is Real: Implementing a Parish Response." Presenters will include Dr. Sharon O'Brien, Director of Catholics for Family Peace, Education and Research Initiative at the National Catholic School of Social Service at The Catholic University of America, and Laura Yeomans, Parish Partners Program Manager for Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Washington.

The link to register for the webinar is: <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/3011723253556477955>

Why Is There An Office Of Safe Environment?

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) requires that all Dioceses/Eparchies have in place a Safe Environment Program for the protection of children and young people. The *“Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People”* was adopted by the USCCB in June 2002 as a response to sexual abuse of minors by Catholic priests and deacons, particularly from the time period of 1950 to 2002. The USCCB established an **Office of Child and Youth Protection** to oversee the application of the Charter’s principles and to create the means for accountability for ensuring implementation of standards.

Reporting

To report suspected cases of sexual abuse of children by personnel of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston to the Diocese, please contact one of the Bishop’s designees at: **304.233.0880 or 1.888.434.6237:**

- Sr. Ellen F. Dunn, O.P., ext. 264
- Mr. Bryan Minor, ext. 263
- Rev. Msgr. Frederick P. Annie, V.G., ext. 267
- Rev. Msgr. Anthony Cincinnati, STD, V.E., ext. 270

You may also fill out and return a confidential **Complaint Form for Allegations of Sexual Abuse of a Minor** by printing one from the Diocese’s web site at www.dwc.org, then clicking Diocese › Offices › Office of Safe Environment › Download Files and Forms or by calling 304.230.1504 to request a form via U.S. mail from the Office of Safe Environment.


West Virginia Adult / Child Abuse Hotline: 1.800.352.6513

The Three Components of Compliance

The Safe Environment Program by the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston consists of the following three components:

- ✓ Background Check
- ✓ Policy Relating to Sexual Abuse of Children (Summer 2014)
- ✓ Awareness training for adults (VIRTUS online or live training)

All three components are mandated by the Diocese for persons seeking employment or seeking to volunteer directly or indirectly with children in any parish, school, or Diocesan program or facility. A person is considered in compliance with the Diocese’s Safe Environment Policy upon successful completion of all three components. Every year, the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston - as well as all other dioceses in the United States - is audited by the USCCB for compliance with its *“Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People.”*

A decorative graphic featuring several autumn leaves in shades of yellow, orange, and red, scattered across the page. The leaves are of various sizes and orientations, creating a seasonal theme.

**Every leaf speaks bliss to me,
Fluttering from the autumn tree ...
-Emily Bronte**