



SAFE ENVIRONMENT TRAINING FOR TEEN AIDES

Persons not yet 18 years old



OUR LADY OF THE LAKE CATHOLIC CHURCH

God has given each of us special and different talents. St Paul describes it like this: *"The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ."*
-1Cor 12:12

We are all part of 'The Body of Christ', and so we all have a special role. Jesus taught us that we should use our special talents to help others.

One place to use those talents to help others is as a volunteer at our church. When we are helping as a volunteer at church, we must realize that we are also taking on added responsibilities.

One of those responsibilities is to help create a place that is safe for all. We must all look out for the safety and well-being others, especially children and vulnerable adults. The Church expects this of us.

In our Catholic communities, we have a program that helps teach us rules and guidelines, some written and some not, that we should follow when we are working as a volunteer. We call this our 'Safe Environment Program.'

What is the 'Safe Environment Program?'

- It is a **Diocese of Dallas program** designed to make sure that all priests, deacons, church employees, and volunteers know how to safely work children or vulnerable adults.
- **ALL priests, deacons, church or school employees, and volunteers** who are over the age of 17 are required to follow this program.
- If there seems to be an indication that someone might not work well with children, they may not be able to be 'cleared' to serve.

What do adults have to do to be considered 'clear' to work with children?

They have to:

- **Fill out a form** telling us who they are and where they live.
- **Read** about what our program is and how it works.
 - Have a criminal **background check**.
- Provide names of at least two people who can act as **references** and say that they know and trust this person.
 - Be **interviewed** in person.
 - Watch a **video** from our **Bishop**.
 - Get **updated training** once a year.

Do teen volunteers ("Teen Aides") have to go thru Safe Environment training?

Sort of....

We use a modified Safe Environment Program for our Teen Aides. Here's why:

- People under 18 years old are considered juveniles by the law, so any criminal records are strictly confidential.
- They have less life experience than adults and are still learning many things.
- Adults are still responsible to make sure teen aides are also safe and protected.

Then, what do Teen Aides have to do?

They have to:

- Read and agree to follow the **Teen Code of Conduct**.
 - This contains **10 basic rules** you will need to follow.
- Have a parent sign a **Parental Consent/ Release Form**.
 - Your parents must say it's OK for you to volunteer and they act as references for you.
- Attend a **Teen Safe Environment Training Session**.

Here is what you agree to when you sign the Code of Conduct:

If you have questions, stop us as we go and ask!

1. I agree to treat other participants, leaders, and staff with respect. I understand that all adult leaders have the authority to discipline me, and I will abide by their decisions.
2. I will always follow the schedule and guidelines given to me.
3. I understand that alcohol, weapons, fireworks, tobacco products of any kind, illegal drugs and profane or abusive language are NOT allowed. (Prescription drugs and over-the-counter medication must be checked and administered by an adult.)

4. I agree to behave in a Christian and positive manner at all times. I further agree to dress appropriately (NO short-shorts, halter/tank tops or torn clothing.)
5. Use of cell phones, digital cameras, i-pods, computers, or any other technology in any way that is offensive or inappropriate (including taking inappropriate photographs, surfing inappropriate websites, displaying and/or sharing inappropriate pictures, videos or music, etc.) is prohibited at all times and in all cases.
6. Sexual indiscretion (including inappropriate touching, language, jokes, etc.) is prohibited at all times and in all cases.

7. No participant is allowed to leave without permission of the coordinator/director.
8. In the event of an emergency or other need to contact any participants, staff must know where I am; therefore I agree to stay on the premises and with at least one other person at all times.
9. I understand that I may be working with children and I agree to take whatever duties I am assigned seriously and responsibly, especially whenever a child's safety is concerned.
10. I understand that if I fail to adhere to any part of this "Code of Conduct" I run the risk of having my parents notified by phone or in person, and I run the risk that I will be sent home if I refuse to follow the guidelines.

Is that all there is to think about?

No! Here are a few rules that the Diocese says adults must follow when working with children. You should be aware of these and know what they mean:

- Have an **adequate number of adults** present at events involving children and youth...**always at least two.**
- Release children only to parent or guardian.
- Always obtain parental approval before permitting any minor to participate any activity that involves potential risk.
- Do not provide minors with alcohol, tobacco, drugs or anything that is prohibited by law.

- Physical contact should be limited and based on the need of the minor.
- Do not engage in the physical discipline of a minor.
 - Do not be alone with a minor in a closed room or isolated area that is inappropriate to a ministry relationship.
- Topics, words, or conversations that could not be used comfortably in the presence of parents should not be used with minors.
 - Sexually explicit material is never appropriate.
- Do not administer medication of any kind without written parental permission.

If you notice anyone violating ANY of these rules, you should immediately report this to an adult that is present!!!!

Whew! Surely that's all!

NO!

It's not possible to list all of the rules, guidelines, and ways we must behave that will fit every situation that might come up.

We provide some rules and general guidance and then we expect that you will use 'common sense' and 'reasonable care' in order to help ensure everyone's safety and well being.

Part of that means that we should stop and consider the possible consequences of our actions and then make good decisions.

Some things you should consider are...

- Is this necessary?
- What might happen?
- Could someone get hurt?
- Might something get broken?
- Is there a better or safer way to do this?

Let's use some scenarios to help us with what 'common sense' or 'reasonable care' might mean



Piggyback rides are fun!

Are they a good idea as a volunteer?

NO!!

Tell me why?

Does that make *sense*? Is that *reasonable* to you?



Who likes to play
football?

Good thing to do at
church with little
kids?

NO!!

Tell me why?

Does that make *sense*? Is that *reasonable* to you?



I can handle taking
the trash out by
myself.

Can I do that as a
church volunteer?

NO!!

Tell me why?

Does that make *sense*? Is that *reasonable* to you?



I like to share my food... candy, peanuts, drinks, with my friends.

Should I do that as a church volunteer?

NO!!

Tell me why?

Does that make *sense*? Is that *reasonable* to you?



I know where the restroom is. I can take a smaller child so that everyone doesn't have to stop the activity.

Is that what I should do?

NO!!

Tell me why?

Does that make *sense*? Is that *reasonable* to you?



My friend has his license so he's going to give me a ride home today.

Should be OK, right?

NO!!*

Tell me why?

Does that make *sense*? Is that *reasonable* to you?



I'll just take my group into the other room by myself to read the story.

Is that a good idea?

NO!!

Tell me why?

Does that make *sense*? Is that *reasonable* to you?

Before we finish up, are there any similar situations you can think of that you are not quite sure about?

Summary of Key Points

1. Only adults who complete the screening process and are cleared are eligible to volunteer and work with children and youth.
2. Only teen aides who complete the Youth Code of Conduct and attend a training session are eligible to volunteer and work with children and youth in our parish.
3. Teen aides may not serve by themselves - - they may only volunteer in activities or events at which at least two cleared adults are present.
4. Some things you may do outside the church while caring for children you know are NOT necessarily safe actions to do in the church setting where there are many children you do not know.

5. Each volunteer must always use reasonable care and common sense when working with children and youth.
6. General supervision is appropriate for low risk activities - - activities where the likelihood of children being harmed is LOW.
7. Close supervision is appropriate for high risk activities - - activities where the likelihood of children being harmed is HIGH (e.g., due to the type of activity, the location, the age and/or numbers of children present, the objects, toys, and/or equipment being used, etc.)
8. To decide if something is "risky" or "not risky," we ask ourselves "what might happen" and we try to think of what might go wrong and be harmful to a child or youth.

That was a lot to think about.
Here is a good general rule that
you can use for all situations:

When in Doubt...

Ask an adult!