



DIOCESE OF FALL RIVER
CHANCERY OFFICE
OFFICE OF SAFE ENVIRONMENT

Bulletin points from the Office of Safe Environment:

1. *See that you do not despise one of these little ones,* for I say to you that their angels in heaven always look upon the face of my heavenly Father. Matthew 18:10*

Did you know...

April is both Child Abuse Prevention Month and Sexual Assault Awareness Month. Child abuse can occur in every culture, religion, and socio-economic demographic. The vast majority of child abuse occurs at the hands of someone known to the child victim. Those who seek to do harm to children will pursue opportunities that provide access to children and may appear to be helpful and friendly. Our Diocesan policy of the **Essential Three** requires that all who minister work, or volunteer in the Diocese complete background screening, training and agree to a code of conduct. This is one of the ways we endeavor to educate our parish and school communities and create a culture of child protection.

2. Did you know....

Research estimates 1 in 6 children will experience online sexual abuse before the age of 18 (Crimes Against Children Research Center 2022). As parents and caregivers, we must remain vigilant and involved in our children's online worlds. Want to know more? Visit <https://protectyoungeyes.com/>

3. What is *Circle of Grace*?

One of the ways our parish creates a culture of protection is by teaching the *Circle of Grace* safe environment curriculum to all enrolled in Faith Formation and Youth Ministry programs and to the students in our Catholic Schools. In an age-appropriate manner, *Circle of Grace* teaches children and youth personal safety skills including recognizing physical, emotional and spiritual boundaries, identifying trusted adults, and taking action if boundary violations occur.

4. Did you know...

All members of the clergy, Directors of Religious Education and teachers in our schools are Mandated Reporters in Massachusetts and required by law to report any suspected child abuse. Many children will not tell anyone they are being abused. Because the Diocese believes in our moral obligation to protect children, we extend the safe environment training to all who minister, work or volunteer. Watch for signs of abuse and, if you are concerned about a child, share those concerns with a mandated reporter at your parish or school. Let us all be a voice for children who may not be able to speak for themselves.

5. The Diocese of Fall River stands firm in its commitment to report abuse to law enforcement and cooperate with investigations. If you have been abused by someone representing the Church (priest, deacon, religious, employee or volunteer), we are sorry. We are here to listen and support you. You can report an incident of abuse by contacting local law enforcement directly and by contacting Diocesan Director of Safe Environment and Victim Assistance, Carolyn Shipp at 508-985-6508 (confidential voice mail) or cshipp@dioc-fr.org. She can assist you in making a report and support you through the process.

Additionally, the Diocese has recently implemented an online reporting option: Awareity Incident Management System. Awareity is a comprehensive and confidential platform for reporting, tracking and documenting incidents and concerns. Through Awareity, you can alert the appropriate Diocesan staff to red flag behaviors such as:

- Harassment
- Boundary issues
- Threats of violence
- Concerning behavior by clergy, staff, or volunteers
- Misconduct

The goal of Awareity is to identify red flags and warning signs before an incident occurs or escalates.

<https://www.fallriverdiocese.org/safe-environment/report-an-incident-of-abuse/>

6. The *Charter for the Protection of Children and People*, commonly referred to as the Dallas Charter, was created by the U.S. Bishops in 2002 in response to the clergy sexual abuse crisis. The Charter created a set of procedures for handling allegations of sexual abuse of a minor, whether historical or current. It calls for all allegations to be reported to local law enforcement, zero tolerance for clergy with credible allegations returning to ministry, establishment of outreach and healing services for survivors. Some of the ways the Diocese of Fall River implements the Charter include:
- Mandates the **Essential Three** requirements (criminal background check, safe environment training, and code of conduct) for all who minister, work or volunteer in the Diocese.
 - Employs a Victim Assistance Coordinator, who is a licensed social worker, to respond to reports of abuse and accompany survivors through their journey.
 - Has an independent **Ministerial Review Board**, comprised of experts with backgrounds including law enforcement, social work, trauma psychology, law, and nursing. As an advisory body to the Bishop, this Board reviews the complete written record for allegations of sexual abuse of a minor by clergy, assesses the credibility of the allegations and provides consultation to the Bishop regarding the cleric's fitness for ministry.
 - Participates in a yearly audit to evaluate the Diocese's implementation of the requirement of the Charter.