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Patrick McGuire, MSW



## Welcome to Our Newsletter

We would like to welcome you to the new continuing education instrument for the personnel of the Archdiocese of New York. Previously, those who had registered in connection with the VIRTUS "Protecting God's Children" class were receiving email bulletins to provide them with on-going training and updates. We have decided to replace that email bulletin and to make continuing education available to more people, by means of this newsletter. Our goal is to make this information more pertinent to the Archdiocese and our policies and practices. As a result, we hope that it will be more useful to you.

Here's how it works. Anyone who attended either Safer Spaces or Protecting God's Children (Virtus) will now get this newsletter. We're also going to send it to all principals and religious education directors, and ask them to distribute or post it, so all their staff members can have access to it. Thank you for all that you do to serve God by working with the children of the Archdiocese. May God bless you all.

Sincerely,

*Edward Meckmann, Director, Safe Environment Program*



*The entire  
Safe Environment  
staff wishes you  
and your loved ones  
a blessed and joyful  
Christmas!*

## What should I do now?

*Patrick McGuire, MSW*

Hopefully, you will never find yourself in the position of having to ask yourself the title question. But sometimes, we all find ourselves in a position where we must not only act, but lead! Some of those reading this article were trained quite a while ago, so we at the Safe Environment Program felt it might be useful to review the procedures for reporting any concerns you may have about potential child sexual abuse.

When it comes to such concerns, there are three primary levels of response to be accounted for. Let's discuss them in order of increasing urgency. The most common situation that needs to be reported is often called the "uneasy in the gut" feeling. Something makes you uncomfortable, or just strikes you as inappropriate. For example, you feel that someone is a little to "touchy-feely" or you notice someone speaking inappropriately around children (something all too common at sporting events). Bear in mind that no accusation is being made under this particular set of events. You have simply noted something that unsettles you in some way.

In this circumstance, you have options regarding the best way to approach the situation. You could discuss it with the person directly. It is likely that the individual does not realize that their actions could be deemed inappropriate. For example, many new rules have been put in place, and it is possible that someone would not be aware of a specific change in policy. The average person will simply realize the error and change their practices accordingly. Likewise, all of us have been misunderstood at some time; hence it is possible that you perceived their actions in a way they had not thought of. Again, informing them gives them the opportunity to adopt a more appropriate approach.

If you are not comfortable talking to the person directly, you can discuss your concerns with their superior. Again, you are not accusing anyone. You are simply pointing out a concern. Under these circumstances, you should also follow up to ensure that your concerns were addressed in some fashion.

Regardless of which option you choose, you need to address your concerns. Frankly, if it is of concern to you, it would likely be of concern to many others as well. So do NOT be afraid to speak up.

The second level of response is a little more obvious. Each of you has been given a Code of Conduct that applies to everyone in the Archdiocese of New York who works with our children, be they paid or volunteer. If someone is in violation of that code, you must report it immediately. For example, the code specifically states that staff should not "share personal space, such as sleeping quarters, alone with children or young people in unsupervised settings." If you see a violation of this practice, you can report them to their supervisor, their department at the Archdiocese, or to the Safe Environment Program itself.

Violations of the Code put children at risk, pure and simple. How? The code sets behavioral boundaries that make it more difficult for a predator to pursue children without standing out. By consistently enforcing the code in each of our programs, we make it far more likely that the grooming behaviors utilized by predators will draw immediate scrutiny; which is of course, the last thing they want! We must make every effort to be sure that we are abiding by the code in a consistent fashion throughout our programs. Please do not hesitate to address a circumstance like this. Appropriate contact information is provided at the end of this arti-

cle.

Finally, what if you find yourself in the worst-case scenario. You reasonably believe that a child is in real danger. If you see evidence of abuse, or a child confides in you that they have been abused, what should you do now? In this circumstance, there is only one course of action. CALL THE AUTHORITIES! When it comes down to choosing between checking things out and protecting a child, the choice should be obvious. Get the child out of harm's way by calling the authorities. Again, contact information for all of our District Attorneys Offices is provided after this article. After you have made that call, if the incident involves the Church in some way, contact the Archdiocese. They will then cooperate in all ways with the authorities.

One other situation that some find themselves in occurs when they become aware of an abusive situation that exists outside their sphere of personal influence. The most efficient way to deal with this is to call the Child Protective Services Hotline. You can make a report anonymously if you wish, but again, please do not ignore the situation.

Please bear in mind that all of us have a moral obligation to protect all of God's children. If we choose to ignore a potentially dangerous situation, we are choosing to leave those children in danger. Please, make the call.

**On the following page is a  
summary of  
Reporting Procedures for the  
Archdiocese of New York.**

