

Diocese of Tucson

GUIDELINES FOR THE SAFE OPERATION OF PARISH OR SCHOOL CHILD CARE SERVICES DURING MASS, MEETINGS OR OTHER EVENTS

Although childcare during Mass, meetings, and other events may be of a short-term nature and take place with parents nearby, safety considerations for the children remain very important. Childcare presents a dynamic environment that must be actively managed by qualified individuals.

The consequences of failing to take reasonable precautions for the protection of children in your care may be significant in many ways. Therefore, childcare operations should be avoided unless the parish or school is prepared and able to devote the time and resources necessary to do it in a safe manner.

KEY ACTION CHECKLIST

1. Have a Plan

- Childcare should only be provided only on a limited basis for limited periods of time to support other parish or school activities.
- Review these guidelines and the Diocese *Safe Environment Program* as adopted by the Parish or School (Parish or School Compliance Plan). Implement the recommendations.
- Using these Guidelines, write a Standing Operating Procedure (SOP) from which to train all personnel in how to carry out the childcare service.
- The SOP should include reference to the mandated reporting law for child abuse.

2. Age and Diaper Changing Requirements

- Children under care should be at least one year old.
- If a child is not toilet trained, his/her parent or guardian must be called to provide diaper changing, if needed.
- The SOP should make clear appropriate times for and methods of holding and lifting infants and young children.

3. Selection of Staff or Volunteers

- Employees and Volunteers who are to work in the childcare program should be carefully selected and screened as high-responsibility personnel according to the Diocese *Safe Environment Program* as adopted by the Parish or School.
- Persons with less than one year's participation in the Parish or School should not be accepted as employees or volunteers engaged in the care of children or youth.
- It is helpful to establish a pool of adults to serve in the care of children or youth. In that manner, screening and education may be done at the time of recruitment; therefore, qualified adults will be available even on short notice.
- Conduct the re-education of adults caring for children or youth at least annually. Base the education on both the Parish or School SOP for childcare and the Code of Conduct.
- Document all training with an Attestation that is kept in the file of the employee or volunteer engaged in the care of children or youth.

- If minors are used to provide service,
 - they should be carefully screened by way of an interview and reference checks,
 - they should be trained with the Code of Conduct for Youth Working with Younger Children and the SOP, and
 - they should be closely supervised.
- The process for young adult (18-21 years of age) employees or volunteers caring for children or youth is essentially the same, but these personnel should also be screened by way of a criminal history check.
- Parents may stop by for a brief time to look in on their children, but they must not be permitted to become an informal childcare volunteer.

4. Informed Consent

Parents or guardians must be made aware of the childcare arrangement and environment.

- Parents/guardians should complete a parental consent form that makes clear the services to be provided and their responsibilities. See ***Child Care Registration Form***.
- Solicit any new information on current health status and chronic conditions such as allergies when a child is signed in.
- A sick child should not be accepted for care.
- Belongings of the child should be labeled with his or her name.
- Prior to leaving his or her child for the first time, a parent or guardian should be encouraged to tour the childcare area.

5. Do Not Provide Food or Medication

- Because of the possibility of severe food allergies (peanuts, wheat, sugar, etc.) food should not be provided by the childcare service. If a child is hungry, his/her parent or guardian should be called.
- Snacks left by a parent for his or her own child are likely to be shared with other children. Again, because of the possibility of food allergies, parents should not leave snacks for their children.
- Medication should not be dispensed.

6. Facility, Environment, and Equipment

An appropriate area should be designated for the childcare operations with particular attention to the following.

- The childcare area should be secure, have required exits, and be located at ground level.
- Windows should be placed in doors to the rooms.
- The childcare area should be free from obvious hazards, and appropriate for the age of the children.
- Some common examples of hazards are: electrical outlets that are not protected, cabinets that are left unlatched, all unsecured toxic materials, cabinets or shelves that are not securely anchored, looped blind cords, and bathroom water temperature hot enough to scald.
- Toys, if any, should be clean and age appropriate with special care to eliminate any toys that present choking hazards.

7. Supervision

Children must be continuously supervised while in your care.

- *At least one parent/legal guardian of a child being cared for must be on the premises and readily available to respond to problems (illness, discipline, diaper changing, etc.).*
- The parental consent form must designate who may pick up the child.
- The child should be signed in and out using the ***Child Care Check-in Form***. If the person picking up the child is not personally known to the care provider, identification should be required.
- An appropriate adult to child ratio should be maintained.
 - Two adults should be present at any time.
 - An overall ratio of one adult to five children is a good starting point; however, children under 18 months require one adult to three children and children 18 months to three years require a one adult to four children.
- Segregate and supervise children by age-group (12 months to 18 months, 18 months to three years, three years to five years, and so forth).
- In no event should children be supervised by anyone other than approved staff or volunteers. If a sufficient number of authorized staff or volunteers are not available, the number of children to be cared for must be reduced or the childcare canceled as appropriate.
- If the parent or guardian is called to care for the child's needs, the parent or guardian must remove the child from the childcare program. Parents/guardians are not permitted in the childcare area for an extended period of time while other children are being supervised.

8. Emergency/Contingency Planning

- Take reasonable care to plan for the supervisors' response to possible emergencies.
- Write plans for responding to emergencies such as fire, violent incursion, missing children, parents/guardians late to pick up the child, or medical crisis.
- An emergency response will typically begin with a call to 911.
- All incidents should be documented on the ***Child Care Accident Report Form*** that is shared with Parish or School leadership and the appropriate office of the Pastoral Center.

9. Forms Associated with these Guidelines

- Child Care Registration Form
- Child Care Check-in Form
- Child Care Accident Report Form