



Safe Environment Principles

Being safe in the time of Covid 19

With our schools and religious education programs rising to the challenge of providing education remotely, questions about safe environment have surfaced. Our safe environment guidelines can be applied in any situation by using specific principles. Caring adults can prevent child sexual abuse by keeping their eyes and ears open to suspicious activity and knowing how to report suspicious activity.

Our **Plan to Protect** program implements safety mechanisms that send a message to all abusers and people with inappropriate boundaries: Child abuse is not tolerated. Children are vigilantly protected. Victims are listened to, heard, and shielded from further abuse. Offenders are identified and punished. That plan counts on adults to:

1. Know the warning signs: Both parents and teachers can be aware of online grooming behaviors. They differ than face to face but are similar in that they deceive the subject into believing they can be trusted. Watch for an abundance of compliments and emotional manipulation. Report such conversations.

For more information, check these sites:

<https://protect.archchicago.org/children-matter-network/resources>

<https://www.missingkids.org/blog/2020/child-online-safety>

2. Control access: Every teacher and employee has an archchicago.org email address. With no exception, the only email used to communicate with a student is to be a school or arch address. Parents can reinforce this by deleting all emails from nonprofessional email addresses. If the message is inappropriate, that should be addressed with the school principal or pastor.

3. Monitor activity: All communications are to be professional whether in person, or through modern technology on online platforms, such as FaceTime, Zoom, Canvas, Teams, etc. Parents must be aware of all sessions and approve the sessions. Under no circumstances is it appropriate for a teacher and student to have a one-on-one conversation without the knowledge of a parent. By modeling appropriate, professional behavior teachers/catechists can help parents and students see the difference between appropriate and inappropriate conversations between a teacher and student.

4. Be aware of children/youth behavior: Some students may have said they disliked school over the years; however, school provided a consistency in their lives. A pattern that some have counted on for months or years. As teachers and parents are working to maintain that consistency, be aware of changes in personality, behaviors, etc. Report any concerns.

5. Communicate your concerns: Means if you know or suspect a child is abused or in danger, contact DCFS at 800-25-Abuse or 911 if the danger is immediate. Even if the behavior doesn't raise to the level of notifying civil authorities but it concerns you, communicate it directly to the person or to a supervisor. If you are hesitant, remember the Cardinal's advice: *put the child in the center of the room and make the decision based on what is best for the child.*

Well informed, caring adults can make a difference.

See something. Say something.