

**ARCHDIOCESE OF LOS ANGELES
SAFEGUARD THE CHILDREN
COMMITTEE HANDBOOK**



***CREATING A SAFE ENVIRONMENT FOR
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE***

SAFEGUARD THE CHILDREN COMMITTEE HANDBOOK
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SAFEGUARD THE CHILDREN COMMITTEE HANDBOOK
LETTER OF INTRODUCTION



Archdiocese of Los Angeles

Office of Safeguard the Children
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Joan Vienna
Director, Safeguard the Children
March 2025

Dear Safeguard the Children Committee Chairperson and Members,

The Safeguard the Children Committees have been the cornerstone of our efforts in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles since the inception of the Safeguard the Children Office in 2004. They play a critical role in helping to establish a safe environment for our children and young people, protecting them from child sexual abuse and other safety concerns.

In February the “2025 Safeguard Committee Survey” was emailed to the Committee Chairs to complete with their individual committee members. Thanks to all of you who participated. Your insights have greatly enhanced our understanding of your priorities and vision. We are pleased to incorporate your feedback into the revised *2025 Safeguard the Children Committee Handbook*, which is designed to provide guidance and resources helping to establish clear objectives to achieve your specific safe environment goals for your parish/school.

A new addition to the revised *Handbook* now includes the “Quick and Easy Safe Environment Resource Guide” which provides you with easy **one click links** so you can access all the latest safe environment policies, procedures, requirements and resources.

We have also incorporated **one click links** from the “Resource Guide” throughout the *Handbook* to demonstrate how easy it is to use. (*See blue italic references at the end of each section*).

As caring adults, we are all called to be the “eyes, ears and voices of our children, young people, and vulnerable adults in protecting them from child sexual abuse. Together, we are making a difference!”

Sincerely,

Joan Vienna, Director

Pastoral Regions: Our Lady of the Angels San Fernando San Gabriel San Pedro Santa Barbara

Archdiocese of Los Angeles
Office of Safeguard the Children
Quick & Easy Safe Environment Resource Guide
March 2025

This “Quick & Easy Safe Environment Easy Resource Guide” is designed to give you “one-click” access to all the safe environment policies, training materials, programs, resources, and contact information you need to fulfill the ongoing commitment to protect our children, young people, and vulnerable adults from sexual abuse.

Every number on the Quick and Easy Resource Guide below corresponds to the mandatory USCCB Safe Environment Audit Report sent annually by Fr. James M. Anguiano, Moderator of the Curia/ Vicar General, during the first week of March. See: <https://lacatholics.org/departments-ministries/safeguard-the-children/>.



1-2 Safeguard the Children Committee Handbook contains complete information and resources – [Archdiocese of Los Angeles Safeguard the Children Committee Handbook](#)

3. “Working Together to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse” brochures should be given to the parents/guardians of your students at the beginning of the school year or during Child Abuse Prevention Month in April.

Order Form for free brochures in English, Spanish, Korean, and Chinese – [Working Together Order Form](#).

4. “Did You Know?” Bulletin Inserts require that your parish have a *Safeguard the Children* section for the “Did You Know” notices in your weekly parish bulletin – <https://lacatholics.org/did-you-know/>.

5. April Child Abuse Prevention Month is celebrated annually to increase awareness throughout our parishes and schools – <https://lacatholics.org/child-abuse-prevention-month/>.

6. Display “Responding to an Allegation of Suspected Child Abuse” in a prominent place and a give a copy to all catechists and/or Youth Ministry leaders – **Reporting Child Abuse** – [Responding to an Allegation of Suspected Child Abuse](#).

7. Office of Victims Assistance Ministry was created to deal with past or current sexual abuse allegations by clergy, religious, or any lay person working or volunteering for the Archdiocese – <https://lacatholics.org/departments-ministries/protecting-children/>.

8. Guidelines for Adults Interacting with Minors at Parish/School Activities or Events must be reviewed and signed annually.

For copy of the documents in English, Spanish, Chinese, or Korean – <https://lacatholics.org/policies-and-procedures/>.

Archdiocese of Los Angeles Boundary Guidelines and Code of Conduct for Middle and High School Youth Working or Volunteering with Children/Youth. *Administrative Handbook* – [Boundary Guidelines and Code of Conduct Minor Volunteers](#).





9. **Initial Safe Environment Training** 3-hour live *VIRTUS® Protecting God's Children 4.0* Adult Awareness Training to be completed before working or volunteering in any ministry. *Administrative Handbook* – [Adult Safe Environment Initial Training Summary](#).

Finding a VIRTUS® Session – <https://lacatholics.org/education-and-training/>.

Adult Recertification Safe Environment Training Summary. *Administrative Handbook* – [Adult Safe Environment Training Recertification Summary](#).

Safe Environment Recertification is every four years. Recertification Options:

Option #1 – Repeating the 3-hour *Protecting God's Children* Certification

Option #2 – Taking the 1½-hour *Keeping the Promise Alive* Recertification

Option #3 – Reading and completing the quizzes for **48 VIRTUS® Online Bulletins**

Option #4 – Taking the *Reporting Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect* Course Online

10. Annual “*Empowering God's Children and Young People®*” Safe Environment Training. All Training must be on a regular class date, not an optional or alternative date. For current lesson plans, permission letters, links, and resources – <https://lacatholics.org/empowering-gods-children/>



- All Empowering God's Children and Young People® Safe Environment Training must be completed **on/or before February 1** of each year.
- All Empowering God's Children and Young People® Safe Environment Training must be recorded on VIRTUS® Online **no later than February 15** of each year.

11. **Opt-Out Forms** – email Brenda Cabrera at bmelendez@la-archdiocese.org.

12. **Fingerprinting Policies & Guidelines.** All persons, whether paid or volunteer, who have regular contact with minors or vulnerable adults, are fingerprinted and agree that the Archdiocese or other specified person will receive any subsequent arrest notifications. Fingerprinting Calendars – <https://lacatholics.org/fingerprinting/>.



13. **Safe Environment Platform (SEP) Operator:**

- Confirms that all adult staff/volunteers have been fingerprinted.
 - Records all Adult Safe Environment Training Records in the database.
- Operator Request Form** – [Click here to download the SEP Request Form](#).

14. **How to Host Fingerprinting at your Facility** – [Download the “Hosting Website Update” here](#).

15. **Short-Term Faculties (Up to Two Months in the Archdiocese).** Priests coming for extended holidays, for study programs, or by invitation who want a parish experience or priests coming to assist in a parish to help with ministry needs (such as those who are in the Archdiocese for summer supply), may receive short-term faculties from the Archdiocese *Administrative Handbook* – <https://handbook.la-archdiocese.org/chapter-5/section-5-13/topic-5-13-5>

16. **Allegation** of Child Sexual Abuse of children by clergy or lay staff member(s) during the current audit period. For information contact Heather Banis hbanis@la-archdiocese.org

17. SAFE ENVIRONMENT CONTACT LIST

Safeguard the Children

Joan Vienna Coordinator	jvienna@la-archdiocese.org	(213) 637-7227
Brenda Cabrera Associate Director	bmelendez@la-archdiocese.org	(213) 637-7508
Annette Vichot Executive Assistant	avichot@la-archdiocese.org	(213) 637-7228

Victims Assistance Ministry

Heather Banis Coordinator	hbanis@la-archdiocese.org	(213) 637-7650
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Fingerprinting

Wilton Perez Manager	wperez@la-archdiocese.org	(213) 637-7411
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Life, Justice and Peace

Isaac Cuevas Director of Immigration and Public Affairs	icuevas@la-archdiocese.org	(213) 637-7484
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Legal Department

Marge Graf Legal Counsel	mggraf@la-archdiocese.org	(213) 637-7511
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FORMING YOUR SAFEGUARD THE CHILDREN COMMITTEE



“Each parish/school site in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles is mandated to have a *Safeguard the Children Committee*. This is not optional.” (September 2004)

The “2025 Safeguard the Children Committee Handbook” is designed to provide a framework for establishing your *Committee*. It offers clear guidance on the roles of *Committee* members and outlines the essential responsibilities of the *Committee*. The following pages contain essential "one-click" links from the Quick and Easy Safe Environment Resource Guide. These links will take you to policies, training materials, reporting forms, and other resources needed to support the important mission of protecting children, young people, and vulnerable adults throughout the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.

THE ROLE OF THE PASTOR/ADMINISTRATOR/PARISH LIFE DIRECTOR OR PASTORAL ASSOCIATE

The Pastor, Administrator, Parish Life Director, or Pastoral Associate is **directly responsible** for establishing, overseeing, and being present at all the Safeguard the Children Committee Meetings. He or she must:

1. PERSONALLY SELECT AND INVITE A VOLUNTEER TO BE THE COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSON:

The Chairperson should be selected by the Pastor, Administrator, Parish Life Director or Pastoral Associate. It is important to look for a person who will understand the purpose of the *Committee* and has an enthusiastic commitment to protecting our children and young people. It can be a police officer, therapist, nurse, school parent or other caring adult from the parish/school community who is passionate about protecting our children and young people and who will:

- **Bring a new perspective and energy from the parish/school community.**
- **Protect staff members from becoming overburdened.**
- **Keep everyone accountable.**

2. ASSURE THE ATTENDANCE OF STAFF COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

The staff members listed below play a crucial role in ensuring the well-being of the children under their care. They hold positions of authority and are responsible for following the USCCB *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*, as well as implementing the Safe Environment policies, procedures, and guidelines set by the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. Their support and enthusiasm are essential for the success of the *Committee*. Staff members should include all relevant positions as applicable:

- **Principal and/or Vice-Principal**
- **Director of Religious Education**
- **Confirmation Coordinator**
- **Youth Minister**
- **Pre-School Coordinator**
- **VIRTUS® Facilitator (Whether staff or volunteer)**

3. IDENTIFY AND SELECT VOLUNTEER COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

The *Committee* is also required to have volunteers who represent the children and youth in the parish/school community:

- **Parent representatives from the Catholic School/Religious Education Program**
- **Representatives from various cultural groups in the parish/school**
- **A representative from the Parish Council**

It is also helpful to have parish/school community members who have expertise in child abuse prevention, such as:

- **Therapist or Social Worker**
- **Law Enforcement Officer**
- **Nurse**

REQUIRED COMMITTEE MEETINGS

“All Safeguard the Children Committees are required to have a minimum of two formal meetings a year, (July 1, 2009).” In these formal meetings, the *Committee* sets the agenda for the activities and goals for the year. It is highly recommended that the *Committee* hold a third formal meeting at the end of the school year to review and celebrate its goals and accomplishments and to set the calendar for the meetings of the coming school year.

REQUIRED COMMITTEE MINUTES



Detailed minutes of at least two *Committee* meetings must be recorded each year and signed by the Pastor, Administrator, Parish Life Director, or Principal (July 1, 2009).

A copy of the minutes must be kept on file at the parish/school site and submitted with the Annual USCCB Safe Environment Parish or High School Audit Compliance Report.

COMMITTEE RESPONSIBILITIES THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

The *Committee* is active throughout the school year. The major areas of responsibility are:

- **Review Archdiocesan policies and procedures and set goals for the school year. (See page 8.)**
- **Schedule and host fingerprinting and/or VIRTUS® Sessions. (See page 8.)**
- **Plan the parish/school Child Abuse Prevention Month Activities. (See pages 9-10.)**
- **Perform additional “Optional” responsibilities at the discretion of the Pastor, Administrator, Parish Life Director or Pastoral Associate. (See pages 12-14.)**

SAFEGUARD THE CHILDREN COMMITTEE MEETING
OPENING PRAYER



CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION BLESSING
(Begin All Safeguard the Children Committee Meetings.)

Dear Lord,

We ask You to bless us, “Your Holy People,” who have gathered here for our Safeguard the Children Committee Meeting. Open our hearts to Your call to be the “eyes, ears, and voice of children and young people everywhere” as You guide us in learning new ways to help prevent child sexual abuse. We are committed to the vision of creating a secure environment for the children and young people in our parishes, schools, homes, and communities as we pledge to continue learning new ways of preventing child sexual abuse.

“Together We Are Making a Difference!”

Amen.

SUGGESTED COMMITTEE MEETING TIMES AND TOPICS

FIRST MEETING: AUGUST/SEPTEMBER: OVERALL PLANNING AND GOALS

The primary focus of the *Safeguard the Children Committee's* first meeting is to convene at the beginning of the school year to review with the staff and ministry leaders what safe environment policies and procedures must be implemented for the parish/school to comply with the USCCB *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*. The following areas require focus from the *Committee* staff members and ministry leaders:

- ☐ Ensure that all parish/school volunteers, teachers, staff, or other paid personnel who work in any capacity with or around children, vulnerable adults, or special needs persons are required to participate in the VIRTUS® Protecting God's Children Awareness Session for Adults and fingerprinted as required.
(#9 - <https://lacatholics.org/education-and-training/>)
- ☐ Determine the number of adults to be trained and schedule Protecting God's Children and Keeping the Promise Alive Recertification Session(s) with the VIRTUS® Facilitator to meet the needs of the parish/school. Many *Committees* help with hospitality and sign-in for the sessions. (Note: Reviewing (Reviewing a printout of the (SEP) the Safe Environment Platform for the parish/school site can be helpful in determining who needs training.)
- ☐ **Help plan, organize, and advertise fingerprinting dates for all parish/school staff and volunteers who are alone with or who have supervisory control over minors. Host fingerprinting session sign-up registration and facility of the hours selected.
(#12 - <https://lacatholics.org/fingerprinting/>)
- ☐ Assure that the Archdiocese of Los Angeles "Guidelines for Adults Interacting with Minors at parish/school Activities or Events" are reviewed and signed annually. The link below to the Guidelines should be given annually to the parish/school staff, volunteers, ministry leaders, and school staff and volunteers. A copy of the signed "Acknowledgement of Receipt" must be filed at the parish/school site.
(#8 - <https://lacatholics.org/policies-and-procedures/>)
- ☐ Confirm that the "Did You Know?" Bulletin Announcements are appearing weekly in parish bulletins and/or parish website.
(#4 - <https://lacatholics.org/did-you-know/>)
- ☐ Order and display the current year's "***Working Together to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse***" free brochures in the parish vestibule, the school and Religious Education Office. Also, the brochures will be distributed during Child Abuse Prevention Month to all parents of school and Religious Education children. (#3 - [2025- 2026 Working Together Form](#))
- ☐ Ensure that Responding to an Allegation of Suspected Child Abuse is prominently displayed in the parish/school offices.
(#6 - [Responding to an Allegation of Suspected Child Abuse](#))

SECOND MEETING: FEBRUARY/MARCH: PLANNING CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION MONTH

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month, a time for parish/school *Committees* to focus on educating the People of God about what we in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles are doing to help prevent child sexual abuse. It is also an opportunity to highlight the vision and commitment of your *Safeguard the Children Committee* by implementing the ideas from the annual Keeping Kids Safe Resource Guide. Together, we can make a difference in stopping child sexual abuse in our parishes, schools, homes, and community!

- ☐ **Plan to celebrate Child Abuse Prevention Month in April at your parish/school. Keeping Kids Safe Resource Booklet distributed from the Office of Safeguard the Children at the beginning of March. (#5 - <https://lacatholics.org/child-abuse-prevention-month/>) (Also see pages 9 and 10 for additional parish/school ideas.)
- ☐ Feature a special Safeguard the Children section in your weekly bulletin and/or parish website, listing your *Safeguard the Children Committee* Chair name and including the *Committee's* mission, goals, and activities. **Special April Child Abuse Month** bulletin announcements are created and are easy-to-use. (#4 - <https://lacatholics.org/did-you-know/>)

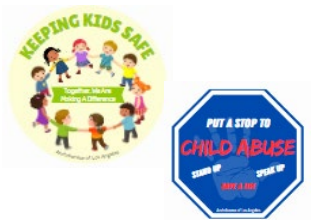
IDEAS FOR CELEBRATING “KEEPING KIDS SAFE” AT PARISHES/SCHOOLS



- Distribute *Working Together to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse* Brochures to all Catholic Schools and Religious Education Parents. (#3 - [Working Together Order Form](#))



- Order the “*Keeping Kids Safe*” and “*Put A Stop to Abuse*” Posters and display them around the parish vestibule and in the school. (#5 - [2025 New “Keeping Kids Safe” Poster/Sticker & “Put a Stop to Child Abuse” Poster/Sticker Order Form](#))



- During the month of April, distribute the “**Keeping Kids Safe**” and “**Put A Stop to Abuse**” Stickers to all Catholic Schools and Religious Education Children. Decorate bulletin boards and other display areas with the posters or create a Ribbon wall with stickers made by the children/youth.



- Create a *Child Abuse Prevention Month Awareness Table* to be displayed after every Mass on the last Sunday of April which has been designated as “Blue Sunday.” It is recommended, if possible, that the *Committee* has the *Table* available on additional Sundays in April. Here are some ideas:

- Display “Keeping Kids Safe” and “Put A Stop to Abuse” Posters
- Hand Out “Keeping Kids Safe” and “Put A Stop to Abuse” stickers to both Children and Adults to wear. These can also be handed out by ushers as people enter Mass.
- Distribute “Working To Prevent Child Sexual Abuse” brochures
- Have copies of the following VIRTUS® Articles:
 - ~ **5 Keys to Monitoring Kids Online Activity**
 - ~ **Artificial Intelligence - Deepfakes and Child Abusers**
 - [Parent Articles](#) (English)
 - [Parent Articles](#) (Spanish)



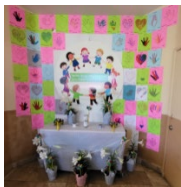
- *St. Elizabeth Ann Seton's* Safeguard the Children Awareness Table.



- *Old Mission Santa Inés Healing Garden* Pinwheel Display.



- *St. John the Evangelist* held a Blue Roses for Blue Sunday with children from the school and the Religious Education program, praying for the prevention of child abuse as well as for survivors of abuse.



- *Dolores Mission's* Safeguard the Children Awareness Wall.



- *Sacred Heart's* Pinwheels with the five steps in English and Spanish, button, and a poster board to provide information on Child Abuse Prevention Month. We enjoyed helping the community.

THIRD MEETING: MAY/JUNE: WRAP-UP MEETING

At the end of the school year, a wrap-up meeting is highly recommended so that the *Safeguard the Children Committee* get together one last time before Summer. This final gathering ensures a smooth transition into next year's planning and fosters a sense of achievement and continuity. This provides a valuable opportunity for the *Committee* to:

- ☐ Pray and reflect on the beautiful Ministry of "Safeguarding the Children" which the *Committee* has been such an important part of over the past year.
- ☐ Review and evaluate the goals the *Committee* set for the year.
- ☐ Celebrate your accomplishments.
- ☐ Schedule the *Committee* meetings for the upcoming school year.

COMMITTEE REVIEW NOTES:

OPTIONAL COMMITTEE RESPONSIBILITIES

Optional Committee Responsibilities may be assigned at the discretion of the Pastor, Administrator, Parish Life Director or Pastoral Associate, depending on the needs of the parish and the availability of the Committee.



#1 ANNUAL USCCB SAFE ENVIRONMENT PRE-AUDIT AND AUDIT PROCESS

- ☐ The Chairperson and *Committee* may be asked to assist the pastor in completing the Annual “USCCB Safe Environment Audit Report” and returning it to the Archdiocese of Los Angeles by the deadline.
<https://lacatholics.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/2025-USCCB-Safe-Environment-Compliance-Report.pdf>
- ☐ The Chairperson must provide a minimum of two sets of *Safeguard the Children Committee* Meeting Minutes to be included with the completed Report. (#1-2 - <https://handbook.la-archdiocese.org/chapter-9/section-9-2>)
- ☐ The Chairperson and *Committee* are also asked to participate in any “onsite” “Safe Environment Pre-Audit” and USCCB audits. (If the Chairperson is a volunteer and cannot participate because of work, this requirement is waived. All parish/school staff who are members of the *Committee* must attend.)
- ☐ The Chairperson and *Committee* review the location of all parish/school safe environment compliance records to help ensure that they are clearly filed and easily accessible (i.e., VIRTUS® “Protecting God’s Children” Certificates, Signature Sheets of “Guidelines for Adults Working and Volunteering with Minors,” Fingerprinting Records verified on VPIN, Children’s Training recorded on VIRTUS® Online, Parent Opt-Out Forms, etc.).

#2 (SEP) SAFE ENVIRONMENT PLATFORM

The administration of SEP (Safe Environment Platform) is usually the responsibility of a paid staff member of the parish/school. On occasion if the Chairperson or a *Committee* member is willing, he/she may be asked to become the SEP Administrator.

Safe Environment Platform (SEP) Operator:

- confirms that all adult staff/volunteers have been fingerprinted.
- records all Adult Safe Environment Training Records in the database.

(#17 Operator Request Form” – [Click here to download the SEP Request Form](#))



#3 PARISH/SCHOOL SITE SAFETY

Although Safeguard the Children focuses on child abuse prevention, it is always also about the safety of our children! The following list is provided to assist the *Committee* in an annual review and evaluation of the parish/school site from the safe environment perspective.

- ☐ Create and maintain an annual record of key holders and access points; recall keys and change locks if needed.
- ☐ Secure secluded rooms or areas in buildings or on the grounds to ensure safety.
- ☐ Conduct safety checks of all rooms used for children's classes/activities, ensuring they are free of dangerous equipment, broken furniture, unsafe stair access, and inappropriate storage or trash.
- ☐ Install clear signs for designated "Children Only" areas (bathrooms, play areas, etc.) and enforce usage rules. Include safety signs where necessary (e.g., "No children in teacher/staff areas").
- ☐ Check property fencing and security to ensure children are safely contained and strangers are kept out.
- ☐ Review and improve check-in/check-out procedures for all programs involving children, including school, Religious Education, Confirmation, Youth Ministry, and after-school activities. Review procedures for monitoring visitors who come to the site and establish sign-in procedures.
- ☐ Consider using "Visitor" badges to identify adults with permission to be on the premises.
- ☐ Ensure that the Digital Meeting Platform Guidelines are implemented. [Digital Meeting Platform Guidelines 4.23.21](#)

COMMITTEE REVIEW NOTES: