

# **Child Safety Training**

## *Circles of Care and Netsmartz*

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

#### **1. Why is it important that we introduce a child safety curriculum into the parishes and schools of the Diocese?**

Introducing a program for children and youth on personal safety issues that respects the role of parents as the primary educators of children is part of the commitment made by the Diocese of Manchester to protect children and young people. *Circles of Care* introduces to students foundational principles of living our faith, especially personal safety, making good decisions, developing wholesome relationships, and self-esteem, all within the context of the religious curriculum for each grade. Article 12 of the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*, which was adopted by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in 2002 and reaffirmed in 2005 and again in 2011, provides that dioceses are to maintain “safe environment” programs, including programs for children and youth, which the diocesan bishop “deems to be in accord with Catholic moral principles.”

Since the fall of 2008, parishes and schools have also had the option to use *Netsmartz* for safe environment training. *Netsmartz* is an interactive, educational safety resource developed by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and the Boys & Girls Clubs of America to teach children and youth how to stay safer on the internet.

#### **2. How much time should we expect to spend each year teaching *Circles of Care* or *Netsmartz*?**

*Circles of Care* and *Netsmartz* provide for one lesson (about 45 minutes) for each grade level per year. However, the teachers can and should remind students of the lessons and materials learned in the lesson throughout the year.

For the high school *Circles of Care* lessons, some schools and parishes have successfully incorporated the curriculum into an extended session, such as a morning or evening retreat experience. Others have divided the lessons into shorter presentations and have covered the material in a series of lessons spaced throughout the year rather than all at once. The high school topics allow for flexibility according to the age and maturity of the group.

#### **3. Is special training required of those who teach the lessons?**

The *Circles of Care* manual contains step-by-step lessons, activities, and prayers for each grade level. The *Netsmartz* lessons include guided lesson plans. No special training is required.

However, for the junior and senior high school *Circles of Care* lessons, it is recommended that consideration be given to planning an Orientation Workshop for the adults who will be teaching the lessons. This will enable the adults to have a better grasp of the

curriculum and to express their preference for which lessons they are most comfortable presenting.

**4. What if a teacher is uncomfortable teaching the lesson to his or her students?**

Some parishes and schools have designated one person (e.g., the Director of Religious Education, the guidance counselor, the youth minister, the nurse) to teach the lesson in the parish or school. Parishes and schools can combine classes for the purposes of teaching the lessons.

**5. Does the teacher need to follow the curriculum word-for-word?**

No - as in all curricula, there will be a need for adjustments based on the students who are in the group, the events happening in our communities and in our world, the comfort level of the instructor, and any other factors influencing the participants. Make these adjustments using your best judgment. Adapt the prayer experiences and the activities as needed. Just be sure to set aside time to teach the appropriate lesson. The goal is to achieve the outcomes that are outlined for each lesson. Consult with other instructors who are teaching in your school or parish program as well as your principal or catechetical leader.

**6. When are the parishes and schools required to complete the lessons for the students?**

The lessons may be taught any time between September and April 30 each year. The completed forms are due at the safe environment office on or before May 1st each year.

**7. What if parents do not want their children to participate in the lesson?**

Parents can decline training for their children but the parish or school should first explain to the parents what the lesson entails and show them the lesson. All lessons are available on the diocesan website at [www.catholicnh.org/child-safety](http://www.catholicnh.org/child-safety) After seeing the lesson and the activities, the parents may change their minds. If they nevertheless do not want their children to attend the lesson, the parents should sign and submit the Declination Form.

**8. What if a student is absent from the lesson because of illness or another commitment?**

Schools and parishes are encouraged to hold a make-up day for those who missed the lesson. Otherwise, absent students should not be included in “numbers trained,” even if the lessons are sent home.

**9. What about religious education students who are home-schooled?**

Home-schooled students should be taught the lesson as part of the regular religious education curriculum. The lessons should be provided to the parents along with the other religious education coursework and the expectation is that the lessons will be taught at home. Home-schooled students should be counted as “trained” unless a parent signs the Declination Form.

**10. Our parish uses a family-based religious education model. How can we teach the lessons?**

Here are some ideas for teaching the lessons to students who attend classes with their parents: (a) divide students into similar-aged groups (e.g., K-2, 3-4; 5-6; etc.). Teach a *Circles of Care* or Netsmartz lesson to the group, with parents present, then have the children complete the worksheets either with parents' help or by themselves while parents have a separate discussion about the topic raised in the lesson; (b) host a "Family Safety Day." Bring in a guest speaker such as local police officer, social worker, or your parish safe environment coordinator. This adult can talk with parents about a child safety topic while students are taught the *Circles of Care* or Netsmartz lessons (again, feel free to group them in similar-age clusters).

**11. What if parents indicate they do not want their children to participate, but they fail or refuse to sign and submit the Declination Form?**

Parents obviously cannot be forced to sign the Declination Form. If parents indicate that they do not want their child to participate but they do not sign the form, the parish or school should complete a form on behalf of the child. The child should be counted as "declined training."

**12. When and how do we notify the Diocese of Manchester that the training was completed?**

On or before May 1<sup>st</sup> each year, the parish or school should send the Tally Sheet and copies of any Declination Forms to: Diocese of Manchester, Attn: Mary Ellen D'Intino, Director of Safe Environment Programs, P.O. Box 310, Manchester, NH 03105-0310.

**13. Our parish does not offer religious education classes. Do we still need to complete and submit the Tally form?**

Yes. Please complete the form, but indicate that the parish has "0" students in each grade.

**14. How long do I keep the documentation?**

Principals and catechetical leaders should keep the classroom attendance sheets, a copy of the Tally Sheet, and copies of Declination Forms on file for seven (7) years.

**14. Where can I get more information about *Circles of Care* and *Netsmartz*?**

Additional information and lesson plans for both programs can be found on the diocesan website at [www.catholicnh.org/child-safety/training/](http://www.catholicnh.org/child-safety/training/)