# Archdiocese of Philadelphia:
# Office of Child and Youth Protection

# Safe Environment Program

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## ABOUT THE PROGRAM:

The prevention of child sexual abuse remains a priority for the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. Since 2003, the Archdiocese has provided mandatory training to more than 73,632 clergy, employees and volunteers in child safety and the prevention of sexual abuse as part of its Safe Environment Program.

The Archdiocese's Safe Environment Program is a proactive model that works to shift the power from the child abuser to the community of protectors. The 73,000-plus adults trained by the program return to their parishes, classrooms and places of service with sound knowledge to foster a network of protection for our young people.

All clergy, employees and volunteers who, during the course of their employment or professional service, come into contact with children must complete the required three-hour training program within 90 days of employment, or they are determined inactive for service. The training provides information on how to report suspected child abuse and what to look for in the behavior of adults toward children that would be inappropriate.

The Safe Environment Program utilizes a curriculum developed by Virtus®, a program and service of the National Catholic Risk Retention Group Inc. The program raises the awareness of the roles that adult leaders have in the lives of the children they serve, such as that of a protector, as a model of appropriate behavior and as an advocate.

The program emphasizes that a child's physical, psychological and behavioral boundaries must be respected, and stresses that educating adults about inappropriate behaviors is an important component of overall efforts to prevent child sexual abuse. Specifically, the program highlights the dynamics of the "grooming behaviors" of abusers. Grooming is a technique used by child abusers to create confusion in the mind of the young person by deceiving them about the intent of the adult. Grooming takes place in an effort to win the support and trust of the young person and sometimes their family and friends.

Awareness of these grooming behaviors and other inappropriate behaviors not only helps adults identify this behavior, but it also helps them understand what appropriate behavior with a young person should look like.  Identifying inappropriate behavior helps adults protect children. Modeling appropriate behavior helps children understand safe adult child relationships.  When adults are alert to inappropriate behavior it creates a network of prevention and protection.   For more information: www.virtusonline.org