



## **Safe Environment Training** *Circles of Care and Netsmartz* **Frequently Asked Questions**

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

Introducing a program for 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 Rockford to protect children and young people. “*Circles of Care* Safe Environment Program” 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 high school 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, 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.”

Diocesan High Schools have the option as well to use materials from *Netsmartz* in combination with the *Circles of Care* lesson plans for grades 9 and 10. *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. Certain videos and corresponding lesson plans from the *Netsmartz* website have been selected by the Diocese for use in the classroom. The use of a *Netsmartz* video or videos is not a substitute for the *Circles of Care* Lesson; but may be used in addition to the *Circles of Care* Lesson.

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

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

High Schools may incorporate the curriculum into an extended session, such as a morning or evening retreat experience; or may divide the lessons into shorter presentations and cover the material in a series of lessons spaced throughout the year rather than all at once. The lesson plans’ 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** program consists of step-by-step lesson plans which include activities, exercises, Scripture readings, and prayers for each grade level. The *Netsmartz* videos include guided lesson plans. No special training is required. However, all instructors of **Circles of Care** Safe Environment Program or the Diocesan Formation in Christian Chastity and Safe Environment Program. It is also recommended that consideration be given to planning an Orientation Workshop for the teachers who will be teaching the lessons. This will enable the teachers 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?**

A High School may designate one person (e.g., the Director of Religious Education, the guidance counselor, the health teacher, a religion teacher, the nurse) to teach the lesson. Schools are also permitted to combine classes for the purposes of teaching the lessons.

**5. Must the teacher follow the curriculum word-for-word?**

No; as in all curricula, adjustments may be required or appropriate, 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 as well as your principal.

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

In the initial year of the implementation of **Circles of Care**, the lessons may be taught at any time between January and April 30, 2010. In subsequent years, the lessons may be taught at any time between September 1 and April 30. The completed tally forms and opt-out forms are due at the Office of Catholic Education on or before May 1st each year.

**7. What if a parent does not want his or her child to participate in the lesson?**

Parents may “opt-out” of the program, but the School should first explain to the parents what the lesson entails and show them the lesson. The curriculum is available on the Diocese’s Office of Catholic Education website. After seeing the lesson and the activities, the parents may change their minds. If they nevertheless do not want their child attending the lessons, the parents should be provided with a copy of the appropriate lesson and asked to complete and sign the **Circles of Care** Opt-Out/Acknowledgement of Training Form. The parents should submit the form to the principal.

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

Schools may choose to hold a make-up day for those who missed the lesson. Otherwise, the School should send the lesson home to the parent of the absent student with the Opt-Out/Acknowledgement of Training form and ask the parent to submit the completed form to the principal **only** if the parent does not intend to train the child at home.

**9. What if a parent fails or refuses to sign and submit the Opt-Out/Acknowledgement of Training form?**

The school obviously cannot require that a parent sign and submit the form. The student should be marked in the record as having not been trained, but the school should keep a record that the lesson was provided to the parent. The school should complete the Opt-Out/Acknowledgement Form and add a notation explaining that the parent did not return the form.

**10. When and how do we notify the Diocese that the training was completed?**

The school should complete the Tally Sheet and include copies of any Opt-Out/Acknowledgement Forms. These should be sent on or before May 1st to: Sister Patricia Downey, O.P., Diocese of Rockford, P.O. Box 7044, Rockford, IL 61125, or via email to [pdowney@rockforddiocese.org](mailto:pdowney@rockforddiocese.org).

**11. Does the School have to keep copies of these documents and, if so, for how long?**

Schools are to keep the classroom attendance sheets, a copy of the Tally Sheet, and copies of Opt-Out/Acknowledgement of Training Forms on file for five (5) years. They may be scanned and kept electronically.

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

Additional information regarding the **Circles of Care** program can be found on the Diocese of Rockford Educational website at <http://www.ceorockford.org> under Child Safety: Grades 9-12 page under the heading: Resources for Parents and Children. Lesson plans for both programs can be found in the Child Safety: Grades 9-12 page under the heading Educator's Guide.

Additional information regarding the *Netsmartz* program can be found on the website, <http://www.netsmartz.org>.