



The Importance of Screening and Selecting Employees and Volunteers

Protecting children, youth and the vulnerable remains one of our key responsibilities as safe adults—which is something that all of us have a vested interest in fulfilling! When it comes to programs within any organization, this includes ensuring that only adults who have demonstrated a commitment to the safety of everyone are actively involved in work and ministry. While we've all participated in this process, it may be helpful to have insight as to why the screening process is essential to safe environments. Simply by participating in your organization's screening process (and leading other adults within your ministry or program to do so as well), you can help meet this ideal and contribute to protecting the vulnerable!

In the past, within the Catholic Church, there has been an assumption that anyone involved with children was trustworthy and did not need to be screened. In many cases, there were no formal screening processes. However, in recent decades, it has become clear that for any potential employee and volunteer, it's imperative that any history or known conduct that could create an issue or lead to future harm is identified. Our organizations often request that this screening process should be completed ahead of time, prior to the person's actual employment or volunteer involvement; it should be standard operating procedure.

How is this step of "screening and selecting" helpful?

It is important to screen and select, so that people with inappropriate behavior or bad intentions don't have access to children or youth. When we are careful about screening and contribute to it ourselves, we send a message to everyone that we are vigilant and serious about the prevention of child sexual abuse. People may sometimes become upset during screening processes, because they believe the organization is saying they aren't trustworthy, or "good" people. We have to shift our focus! **This isn't about trusting any one person—it's about holding everyone to the same standard and doing everything possible to protect children.**

What screening and selecting methods should be in place?

When recruiting volunteers or hiring employees, whether applicants have direct or indirect access to children, organizations should:

- Require some type of standard application.
- Distribute a policy and code of conduct and obtain a signed acknowledgement of receipt.
- Provide safe environment training.
- Conduct face-to-face interviews.
- Conduct criminal background checks, especially for individuals who will be working closely with children or youth.
- Conduct a reference check and prior employer check.

Adopting the above proactive screening procedures makes it more difficult for people with bad intentions—or, even those with good intentions, yet *problematic behavior*—to have access to youth. Problematic behavior is important to review and address, because children could be conditioned to more easily accept abusive or boundary-violating actions based on the inappropriate behavior of any adult

(even ones who have good intentions). Many of the examples listed above should be renewed periodically, such as criminal background checks, reviewing and acknowledging the code of conduct, and safe environment training.

No one is "guaranteed" to work with, or care for, our children—it's entrusted only to those adults who *consistently* demonstrate they can keep children protected and safe. If we don't consistently implement screening procedures, then we create an opportunity for someone who does not have good intentions to take advantage.

How does this process impact me, as an employee or volunteer?

Every adult serving within a parish, school, or other organization, can make a difference when it comes to maintaining a safe environment. Your participation, as well as the participation of all adults in completing a screening process, helps to provide one more element of protection to the children, youth and vulnerable within your community. The screening process also allows you, as an employee or volunteer, to ask your own questions and determine the best fit for your skill set within an organization. The reality is that most people are easily screened and navigate through the process smoothly. However, there are situations where people have criminal histories of abusing children or other barrier types of crimes that would preclude them from ministry, yet still go through the process—believing that the organization won't actually check, or, that they'll be able to convince others that they were wrongly accused or that the entire situation was overblown. If we can prevent even one abuser, person with inappropriate boundaries, or person with a history of criminal behavior from serving within our communities—we have upheld our mission to keep children and youth safer.

Continuing our commitment to screen and select

Screening and selecting employees and volunteers is not a "one and done" measure. Rather, it should be an ongoing process that continuously evaluates all adults, to ensure only those who continue to demonstrate safe behaviors have access to children and youth.

While there are no methods that completely prevent child abusers from gaining access to children and youth, we can implement strong screening and selection methods to "weed out" adults who may not be appropriate to serve. By creating a multi-step process of screening prior to selecting employees and volunteers, we create multiple opportunities to uncover problematic behavior or histories that would prevent adults with unsafe behavior from serving with children. However, these steps and methods are not a "fail safe," and are most effective only when used in partnership with the remaining four steps.

Recall the spirit of the five steps from the *Protecting God's Children* Program:

1. *Know the Warning Signs of Adults*
2. *Screen and Select Employees and Volunteers*
3. *Monitor All Environments, including Activities Involving Technology*
4. *Be Attentive to Children and Youth and,*
5. *Communicate Your Concerns*

By following each of the five steps, including screening and selecting employees and volunteers, we can help promote safe environments within our parishes, schools and communities. Thank you for your willingness as a safe adult to undergo the screening and selecting process, as well as your commitment to keeping children, youth and the vulnerable safe.