

A PROGRAM AND SERVICE OF
THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC RISK RETENTION GROUP, INC.



VIRTUS[®] *Online*

Where do I start?

School is starting soon and that means all those other activities for children are gearing up. Scouting, team sports, gymnastics, and dance classes are just a few of the programs that are available for children and young people. Regardless of how much or how little extracurricular activity is part of a child's life, one thing is certain—safety first must be the motto of parents, guardians, and other caring adults when choosing program activities for children and young people.

Knowing that, what is the best way for caring adults to make sure that programs are doing all they can do to make sure that children and young people have a safe and enjoyable experience?

In Step 3 of Protecting God's Children[®] for Adults, we recommend that adults and organizations "Monitor All Programs." For the most part, the emphasis in this step has been on overseeing programs on the premises of the church or school. However, as we begin to consider activities for the children in our lives, there is an opportunity to apply the principles of the program in the investigation and evaluation of programs and activities for our children.

As a caring adult, monitoring all programs should include three significant inquiries before you leave your child to participate.

- **Screening Practices**—Find out the process used by the organization to screen the adult participants. Everyone needs to be subjected to the same scrutiny. Making sure that everyone who regularly interacts with children has been thoroughly screened through a process that includes, at a minimum, an application, a personal interview, and a criminal background check. If there is no screening process or if the answer is that "we know everyone here," parents and guardians must be willing to demand more or move on.
- **Program Practices**—Make sure that there are practices in place that protect everyone involved. For example, find out how the activities are monitored by those in charge. Do they watch the programs? Are children ever left alone in secluded areas with adult volunteers or staff? Is there adequate supervision for every aspect of the program? Do supervisors drop in unannounced to check on programs?
- **Policies and Procedures**—Ask for a copy of the policies and procedures that apply to the interactions between children and young people and the adults in the program. Read them carefully to be sure that program organizers and managers have thoughtfully developed procedures and established policies that protect the well-being and reputation of everyone involved. In addition, ask management to explain how the policies and procedures are enforced. How do they make sure that what is presented in writing is the actual practice of staff and volunteers?

No one can be 100% sure that children and young people are safe at all times. However, alert parents, guardians, and other caring adults that have participated in the Protecting God's Children program have everything they need to demand that those who offer programs and services to children and young people also make sure that the environment for those events is safe for all involved. Through proactive measures, Protecting God's Children participants can begin to impact the broader society and create new standards for operating children's programs and services.



1) School is starting and, after having watched the Olympics, your 8 year old is begging to participate in gymnastics. During the summer she attended camp and beginning gymnastics was one of the activities provided. You notice in the phone book that there are several programs for kids her age. You have done some research on the professional reputations of the available programs but you have no idea how the programs are run. When you interview the programs, what kind of responses to questions about safety issues should give you concerns?

- A) Owners or managers who respond to inquiries about hiring practices by saying that the coaches in their program have been around for years and have great reputations.
 - B) Owners or managers that cannot quickly find the policies and procedures for maintaining appropriate boundaries in coaching relationships. The book seems to be on a shelf or put away somewhere out of sight.
 - C) Owners or managers that argue for their own judgment about people as the best measuring stick for someone being the right person for the job.
 - D) Any of the above answers should raise concerns about how serious the program is about real safety issues.
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