

Diocese of Ontario**ASSESSING RISK**

Screen for the level of risk inherent in the ministry position. Remember, it is the position not the person being assessed.

List All the Ministry Activities and Positions

Each parish or organization shall make a list of all positions associated with the church or organization, whether short-term, long-term, formally or informally established, paid or volunteer, involving laity or the ordained, taking place on Sunday or during the week, on church premises or off-site. (Appendix A, List of Ministry Positions)

List All the Duties and Responsibilities for Each Activity or Position

List all the tasks, duties and responsibilities for each ministry positions listed above. (Appendix B, Ministry Position Template and Appendix C, Sample Ministry Descriptions) These preliminary lists will be used to assess the risks of each ministry activity and to establish proper screening standards.

Assess Risk for Potential Harm

Assess the level of power, authority and control of those who minister, the level of vulnerability of those being ministered to, and the risk that harm could be committed by sexual harassment, exploitation, assault, emotional, verbal, physical, spiritual or financial abuse. Determine the risk level and assign a low, medium or high rating. Appendix D, Risk Assessment Checklist, provides a more thorough worksheet to help assess the level of risk of a position. Retain the worksheet, if used, as documentation of the decision-making process for assessing risk. A ministry can shift from medium to high risk depending on the specific setting, activity and leadership arrangement of a particular event. The highest risk activity within a given ministry will determine its risk rating.

Low Risk Ministries: Ministry duties and responsibilities that do not permit a person to be alone with a child or vulnerable adult, or do not permit access to financial resources or confidential information. Such ministries do not require a significant level of authority or trust. **Examples:** *arranger of coffee fellowship, audio-visual controller, bulletin folder, flower arranger, greeter, reader, some committee and group members*

Medium Risk Ministries: Ministry duties and responsibilities that permit few chances for a person to be alone with a child or vulnerable adult or permit some access to moderate amounts of financial resources or confidential information. People in these ministries are in a position of authority or trust. **Examples:** *adult Bible study leader, advisory board member, chairperson, lay eucharistic administrator, team collection counter, team nursing home visitor*

High Risk Ministries: Ministry duties and responsibilities that permit opportunities for a person to be alone with a child or vulnerable adult or permit access to

significant amounts of financial resources or sensitive and confidential information. These ministries are positions of authority or the positions that allow a person to establish long-term relationships of trust. The following are always ranked high risk: residential or off-site ministries with children or vulnerable adults, parish employees, churchwardens, and organists. **Examples:** *camp leader, Christian education coordinator, organist, churchwarden, clergy, counselor, home visitor, parish employee, parish nurse, server instructor, Sunday school teacher, youth leader.*

Reduce the Risk for Potential Harm

Whenever possible, the risk associated with any ministry should be lessened or eliminated. This can be accomplished by changing the size of a group being ministered to, the number of leaders required, the location and visibility of the ministry, the level of supervision or the degree of authority associated with the position. It is much easier, and ultimately safer, to reduce the risks associated with any ministry than to apply a higher level of screening.

Finalize Ministry Descriptions

The parish or organization will provide a Ministry Description for all medium and high risk ministries. The ministry descriptions will include the title, length of term, responsibilities, skills required, qualifications needed, limits of the position, reporting relationship, benefits and opportunities and screening requirements. (Appendix B, Ministry Description Template, Appendix C, Sample Ministry Descriptions)

Definition of Vulnerable Person

The term “vulnerable person” includes not only people typically recognized as vulnerable, such as children, youth, some of the elderly, hospital patients, the mentally and physically disabled, but also to those otherwise healthy adults who become vulnerable because of personal circumstances. Such circumstances might include, but are not limited to, those grieving the death of a loved one, those experiencing job loss or career difficulties, those facing illness in themselves or others, and those facing other uncertainties. It is important to recognize that all people are vulnerable to varying degrees at different stages in their lives.

Individuals Holding Multiple Positions within the Parish

Individuals who hold more than one position within a parish or organization are to be screened in a manner consistent with the position that holds the highest level of risk and has the most stringent screening requirements.

Elected Positions within the Parish or Organization

There are a number of elected positions in most parishes and organizations. These positions are subject to the same screening procedures as all other positions. It should be made clear to both the elected individual and to the parish at large that following the election the individual will have to meet the requirements of the screening process before serving in the elected position. When possible, screening requirements should be addressed with nominees, prior to election in order to avoid potential confusion and/or embarrassment.

Screening Standards for Parish Employees

Many of our church employees are given authority, by virtue of their position, and perform their work/ministry with little supervision in places where they could have access to children and vulnerable adults. Therefore, normally, all paid positions in the church will be ranked as a High Risk Ministry and the screening standards of this risk level are to be applied to it. Exceptions to this norm should be documented and kept with the ministry description for this position.

Screening Standards for Ordained Ministry

Ordained ministry takes place in a variety of contexts, some of which are unsupervised and demanding and where there is a highly visible public role in the faith and secular community. The ordained person must work with the needy and vulnerable of society in such a manner that trust and pastoral integrity of the relationship is never compromised. It is essential, therefore, that the diocese make every effort to ensure the people who are called to ordained ministry are able to cope with this responsibility and trust. Ordained ministry is ranked as a High Risk Ministry and the screening standards of this risk level are to be applied to it.