



Honor Thy Children

Archdiocese of Louisville continuing education for the awareness and prevention of child abuse

PREVENTING CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

It is everyone's job when it comes to neglect

Sexual abuse affects both boys and girls of all ages, in all kinds of neighborhoods and communities. Children are more likely to be sexually abused by someone they know and trust than by a stranger. Abusers do not always use physical force. Many use games, gifts, lies, or threats to engage children and to keep them from telling anyone what has happened.

What You Can Do? To prevent child sexual abuse, it is important to keep the focus on adult responsibility, while teaching children skills to help them protect themselves. Consider the following tips:

- Take an active role in your children's lives. Learn about their activities and people with whom they are involved. Stay alert for possible problems.
- Watch for "grooming" behaviors in adults who spend time with your child. Warning signs may include frequently finding

ways to be alone with your child, ignoring your child's need for privacy (e.g., in the bathroom), or giving gifts or money for no particular occasion

- Ensure that organizations, groups, and teams that your children are involved with minimize one-on-one time between children and adults. Ask how staff and volunteers are screened and supervised.

- Make sure your children know that they can talk to you about anything that bothers or confuses them.

- Teach children accurate names of private body parts and the difference between touches that are "okay" and "not okay."

- Empower children to make decisions about their bodies by allowing them age-appropriate privacy and encouraging them to say "no" when they do not want to touch or be touched by others, even in nonsexual ways.

- Teach children to take care of their own bodies (e.g., bathing or using the

bathroom) so they do not have to rely on adults or older children for help.

- Educate children about the difference between good secrets (such as birthday surprises) and bad secrets (those that make the child feel unsafe or uncomfortable).

- Monitor children's use of technology, including cell phones, social networking sites, and messaging. Review contact lists regularly and ask about any people you don't recognize.

- Trust your instincts! If you feel uneasy about leaving your child with someone, don't do it. If you are concerned about possible sexual abuse, ask questions.

- If your child tells you that he or she has been abused, stay calm, listen carefully, and never blame the child. Thank your child for telling you. Report the abuse right away

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If you need support or someone to talk to:

- ☉ Prevent Child Abuse Kentucky or Indiana: 800.CHILDREN/800.422.4453 www.pcaky.org www.pcain.org
- ☉ Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline 800.4.A.CHILD 800.422.4453 www.childhelp.org

Signs of Possible Sexual Abuse

- Unexplained pain, itching, redness or bleeding in the genital area
 - Increased nightmares or bedwetting
 - Withdrawn behavior
 - Angry outbursts/mood swings
 - Loss of appetite or difficulty swallowing
 - Sudden/unexplained avoidance of certain people or places
 - Sexual knowledge, language or behavior that is unusual for the child's age.
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TALKING TO YOUR CHILD ABOUT SEXUAL ABUSE

Parents are surrounded by messages about child sexual abuse. Talkshows and TV news warn parents about dangers on the Internet, at school and at home. However, parents don't get much advice on how to talk to their children if they are concerned that sexual abuse is occurring. Here are some tips for talking to a child who you think has been sexually abused.

- Talk to your child directly.
- Pick your time and place carefully. Have this conversation somewhere that your child feels comfortable.
- DO NOT ask your child about child abuse in front of the person you think may be abusing the child.
- Ask if anyone has been touching them in ways that don't feel okay or that make them feel uncomfortable.
- Know that sexual abuse can feel good to the victim, so asking your child if someone is hurting them may not get the information that you are looking for.
- Follow up on whatever made you concerned. If there was something your child said or did that made you concerned, ask about that.
- Ask in a nonjudgmental way, and take care to avoid shaming your child as you ask questions.
- "I" questions can be very helpful. Rather than beginning your conver-

sation by saying "You (the child) did something/said something that made me worry..." consider starting your inquiry with the word "I." For example: "I am concerned because I heard you say that you are not allowed to close the bathroom door."

- Make sure that your child knows that they are not in trouble, and that you are simply trying to gather more information.
- Talk with your child about secrets.
- Sometimes abusers will tell children that sexual abuse is a secret just between them. They may ask the child to promise to keep it secret.
- When you talk to your child, talk about times that it's okay not to keep a secret, even if they made a promise.
- Build a trusting relationship with your child.
- Let your child know that it is okay to come to you if someone is making them uncomfortable.
- Be sure to follow up on any promises you make—if you tell your child that they can talk to you, be sure to make time for them when they do come to you!
- All children should know that it's okay to say "no" to touches that make them uncomfortable or if someone is touching them in ways

that make them uncomfortable and that they should tell a trusted adult as soon as possible.

- Let your child know that you won't get angry at them if they tell someone "no." Children are often afraid that they will get into trouble if they tell someone not to touch them.
- Teach children that some parts of their body are private.
- Tell children that if someone tries to touch those private areas or wants to look at them, OR if someone tries to show the child their own private parts, they should tell a trusted adult as soon as possible.
- Let children know that they will not be in trouble if they tell you about inappropriate touching.
- Make sure to follow through on this if your child does tell you about inappropriate touching! Try not to react with anger towards the child. If you have reason to be concerned about sexual abuse, there may be other signs of sexual abuse as well. As you talk to your child about sexual abuse, remember to focus on creating a safe place for your child. Even if they don't tell you about sexual abuse at the time of the conversation, you are laying a foundation for future conversations.

HONOR THY CHILDREN TRAINING

Those employed or volunteering with youth must undergo a background check every 5 years as well as attend the "Honor Thy Children Training" that addresses child abuse, how to recognize it and how to report it. See your parish/school Safe Environment Coordinator if you have not sat-

isfied either of these requirements. The "Honor Thy Children" training is a one time requirement and is normally completed within 30 days of beginning service. The background check MUST be completed BEFORE any service/employment begins.

UPCOMING TRAININGS

A current list of trainings is always available at www.archlou.org/safe

Be sure to check back often as training dates are subject to change and of course weather delays also subject to change

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Office of Safe Environment**

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No child or adult should ever experience abuse by anyone, especially a church minister. We all have the right to be treated with dignity and to expect our church to reflect the goodness of God in all of its dealings.

We hope that this information is helpful to all in our communities who are working to prevent and respond to childhood sexual abuse. Please let us know if you need further assistance or information by calling or emailing our victim assistance coordinator, Ms. Martine Siegel, at 502/636-1044; victimassistance@archlou.org or the Chancery at 502/585-3291.

We must heed God's call to care for the most vulnerable among us and to continue our efforts toward wholeness and health in dealing with sexual abuse.

WHEN/WHO SHOULD REPORT CHILD ABUSE

When you have reason to believe a child is being abused, neglected or is dependent, call the Kentucky child protection hotline at 1-877-597-2331 or your county Department for Community Based Services. If in doubt, call and talk over what has come to your attention. The Cabinet for Health and Family Services will help you sort things out, such as whether a specific incident must be reported and to whom. If you feel the child is in imminent danger or is in need of immediate protection, call 911 or your local police department. For example, a very young child or handicapped child who is left alone with no adult

supervision needs immediate help. Police officers can remove a minor from a threatening environment in order to protect the child if the child is in danger of imminent death or serious physical injury or is being sexually abused and the custodian is unable/unwilling to protect the child.

Kentucky law states that it is the duty of **everyone** who has reasonable cause to believe that a child is dependent, abused or neglected to report this information. KRS 620.030 states:

(1) Any person who knows or has reasonable cause to believe that a child is dependent, neglected or

abused shall immediately cause an oral or written report to be made to a local law enforcement agency or the Kentucky State Police; the Cabinet or its designated representative; the commonwealth's attorney or the county attorney; by telephone or otherwise.

Should you have any questions or concerns when it comes to reporting suspected child abuse please consult the child protection hotline or call the Archdiocese of Louisville's Victim Assistance Coordinator, Martine Siegel at 502.636.1044. If you prefer you can also communicate via email to victimassistance@archlou.org.