Honor Thy Children

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

SPRING, SUMMER, FALL OR WINTER CAMPS: QUESTIONS YOU SHOULD BE ASKING

This past December CBS News broke a story where they identified hundreds of reports of sexual abuse at children’s camps around the country. Many of them in summer camps. In one case a mother (who chose to remain anonymous) said when her son returned home she knew something wasn’t right. “He was a different kid... he was not the happy-go-lucky little boy that loved to play outside. He was totally different. He just wanted to lay on the couch.” It was 10 months later when her son revealed his camp counselor had allegedly molested him. Jon Conte, who studies abuse and trauma at the University of Washington told CBS News, “That’s probably just the tip of the iceberg,” “I think it’s isolation from parents, it’s out of a normal routine. Some kids are a little bit older and they’re feeling more independent, and they may have a false sense of security,” Conte said. As nearly 14 million kids attend camps each year, there are no national regulations for camps to follow. According to CBS News some states have NO requirements for overnight camps to licensed and believe it or not, other states don’t require background checks for employees.

The mother told CBS News, “Camps are wonderful. Camps are a part of growing up. My other children attend camp. But I check very carefully, now, the camp. I don’t listen for a camp owner to tell me how the camp is.” Whether it’s athletic camp or summer camp, below are some helpful questions to ask before sending your child off to any camp.

- What trainings do staff receive to keep children safe? Staff should also be trained in recognizing and reporting child physical abuse. The counselors should have a clear understanding of inappropriate disciplinary procedures and what to do if they encounter others using them. They should also be trained in recognizing signs and symptoms of child sexual abuse. Parents should find out how the camp disciplines children, and in what type of circumstances they would be contacted if their child’s behavior was problematic.

- How are staff screened? It’s good to know the background and experience of the counselors caring for your child. The camp operator should verify information on resumes and maintain files with appropriate qualifications needed for the job, such as licenses, certifications and references. Some states require a criminal background check and a search of the sex offender registry, too. Find out how the camp handles these issues.

- How does the camp screen visitors? Parents should make sure that there is a method for making sure that unauthorized visitors are not allowed access to their child. It’s also important for the camps to account for attendance and dismissal from camps. Parents should have a plan in place designating how the child is to leave the camp, including the names of those that have permission to visit or escort their child home.

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Archdiocese of Louisville

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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

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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.
ARE YOU SAFE ENVIRONMENT COMPLIANT? DO YOU NEED TO BE?

Volunteers are the lifeline of our parishes. Without them our they couldn't do many of the things they do today. This includes working with children. To do this both staff and volunteers must be Safe Environment Compliant. Perhaps you’re working with vacation bible school over the summer or even coaching in the fall. Maybe you’re a coordinator responsible for those working with children. Are you familiar with the policies of the Archdiocese of Louisville? For example, did you know that a minimum of two adults MUST ALWAYS be present during activities for minors? Did you know that as a volunteer you are to avoid driving alone in a vehicle with a young person other than your own child? These are just two requirements adults working with children must follow according to the Archdiocese’s Code of Conduct.

This code along with understanding and identifying child abuse are discussed at one of the many Safe Environment trainings offered by the Archdiocese of Louisville. Anyone working with children on a regular basis within the Archdiocese must complete the Safe Environment Training and have completed a satisfactory background check within the last five years. This is also required of all employees within the Archdiocese of Louisville. Are you currently serving in a position that requires you to be safe environment compliant?

If you answered yes and have not attended a training or completed the background check you could be in violation of not only Archdiocesan policy, but in some cases Kentucky State Law.

Are you a volunteer coordinator or supervisor who manages people that work with children on a regular basis? It is also your responsibility to ensure coaches, volunteers and employees are compliant. The Archdiocese is audited on a yearly basis for compliance. Every third year an onsite audit is conducted by the USCCB where auditors can ask to look at your records.

The summer is a great time to make sure your house is in order. Identify those who need to be compliant and ensure they’ve attended a training while checking their background check to see if it is older than 5 years. In August of 2014 we transitioned to selection.com for background checks. Many schools/parishes at that time ran new checks on the bulk of their volunteers/employees. Those checks are now coming due for a five year renewal. Are you?

Now is also the ideal time for athletic directors to identify fall sports and coaches you know will be coaching. Are those you know coaching compliant?

If you are a parent we always encourage you to ask if those working with your child are compliant? Each school or parish as a Safe Environment Coordinator. If you don’t know who that is or simply have questions about Safe Environment feel free to reach out to Scott Fitzgerald, Archdiocese of Louisville Coordinator of Safe Environment Services (email: fitzgerald@archlou.org) or (502.471.2132).

WHY LIVE TRAININGS?

Because we do live training in the Archdiocese, we are able to interact with thousands of individuals (more than 48,000 since the training started in 2003). After the training, we have people lining up to tell their stories. Following a live training, we were told of the arrest of a father who had been abusing his children because one of his adult children attended a safe environment training and felt empowered to report. Others talk to us about their abuse as children. They tell us how the class helped them to recognize that they need help, and we are able to refer them to the assistance they need. Many attendees who come in with skeptical expressions and crossed arms leave with heartfelt thanks for all they learned.

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PREVENTING ABUSE: MINIMIZING THE RISK

When it comes to child sexual abuse minimizing the opportunity for abuse before it happens will go a long way. This means paying more attention to surroundings you may take for granted are safe. It’s well known that an estimated 80% child sexual abuse often occurs in 1:1 situations where the abuser and victim are out of sight of others. In some cases it’s with someone the victim (and the family) trusts. Identifying these situations and avoiding isolation of children can greatly reduce the risk of child sexual abuse. Below are some examples of places many never think of abuse happening but can and how you can make yourself aware.

- As we learned in the Larry Nassar case, the pediatrician’s office. Even when in the room pay attention to what’s going on. Past cases of abuse have shown us that abuse can occur when the parent is in the room. If you’re being asked to leave the room, it’s probably for a good reason but ask if a medical assistant can be present.
- When it comes to babysitters be wary of anyone who is eager to babysit who is not someone you would normally call (i.e. grandmother, etc.) If a family friend or co-worker offers to babysit for free, take notice if you don’t have good reason to trust their intentions.
- In more casual situations such as in-home piano lessons, karate studio or dance classes vet the situation. If in someone’s home ask for references. If the lessons are in a basement or back room and you’re not allowed to stay you may want to take notice. Even if the lesson is only an hour, abuse can happen in an hour.
- If the lessons are taking place at a business, identify where the bathrooms are. Can others see into the training room? Most importantly don’t be afraid to ask about the screening process for employees. Always ask how old their background check is. Get to know the other parents and encourage them to ask questions of management so they understand abuse prevention is a priority.
- Unfortunately a large number of abuse cases are a result of family members. Make sure you have an open door policy either at home or someone else’s house. One on one time with a family member doesn’t have to be in a closed room.
- Remain vigilant at parties. A crowded room is a perfect storm for a young person to go unnoticed. Before guests arrive encourage your children to stay in view.

Home, school or the doctor’s office are all places we tend take for granted as “safe”, unfortunately most abuse occurs because we trust and let our guard down. Be vigilant, be aware and most of all communicate with your child about body safety at an early age. An empowered child who understands they can talk to you about anything goes a long way in preventing child sexual abuse.

“Until we accept that our children have much more of a risk of being sexually abused than drowning in a pool, being struck by a car, or stricken with cancer...we contribute to the culture of panic and ignorance” - Ann Brasco

MONTHLY SAFE ENVIRONMENT TIP

So you've attended Safe Environment Training now what?

Immediately following your attendance at Safe Environment Training it is important that you check in with your parish/school as soon as you can.

After each training you will be given proof of attendance. You will need to take a copy of this back to your parish/school for their records.

Be sure to keep the original for your records so you can present this as proof of your training should you serve in another parish/school.

Did you know that your background check is good for 5 years?

Do you volunteer at multiple parishes? Do you maybe work at one parish but volunteer at another?

Be sure to tell your Safe Environment Coordinator that you already have a current background check on file and that can be transferred to your new parish saving everyone time (and money!)

Should you have any questions concerning your status, feel free to reach out to your parish/school Safe Environment Coordinator or

Scott Fitzgerald
Archdiocese of Louisville
Coordinator of
Safe Environment Services
(sfitzgerald@archlou.org)
502.471.2132
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 Pastoral Center 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.

PATRICIA'S STORY: FIND YOUR HAPPINESS

ABUSE VICTIM PATRICIA TELLS HER STORY CREDIT WWW.CHILDEHELP.ORG

It's difficult to put my twelve years of sexual, physical, emotional, and neglectful abuse as a child into words that would fit into a story here. As a child, the abuse was a constant. My stepfather started sexually attacking me at age 5, the night of my mom's bridal shower. His attacks were always as hurtful as possible. He enjoyed the fear in my young eyes. He loved to find a reason to beat me so that he could see that fear. For twelve years he controlled everything in my life. My mother chose to ignore the brutal physical attacks; the bruises & bleeding. She allowed him to take me on their dates at around age 12. My mother walked in on us, me in his bed naked at age 9; but I was the one who got punished and sent to my room for the night. Mom completely neglected my care. There were never any hugs of tenderness or encouragement. She never bought me a toothbrush, took me to a dentist, or cared about any other need of mine. At age 13 I chose to stop bathing because he loved to trap me, it didn't matter who was around. He was a very sadistic monster and my mother turned her head. The entire town knew who my parents were and they knew if I sneezed, but everyone ignored the filth on my skin, the decay in my mouth, and the monster who was my stepfather. There was never anyone to talk to or a safe place to run. This was during the 1970's; society was starting to take notice, but no one would challenge the monster I lived with. Every day I held my breath and worried about when he would attack. One night I tried to prevent the molestation by putting on my brother's flannel pajamas - I was beaten and thrown around the house for two hours.

Since there was never anyone who even questioned my well being or tried to protect me; I became trained to accept violent behavior. It led me through a path of over 20 years in brutal domestic violence. One relationship after another was just someone else to beat on me. The last beating I accepted caused permanent injury which has left me disabled.

It was after that beating at 37 when I made the decision that no love was worth this type of abuse. My children and I would be safe and I did it on my own. Finally, my life changed; when I made the motions to change it and stop the abuse against me. It's been 10 years since I've been safe and I've chosen to share my story with others. Anyone who survives these crimes should be so proud of themselves and appreciate their strength. Look at what we have gone through, is there really anything in life that could destroy who we are? They might try and they might leave their mark, but they cannot destroy what is created inside of us. You can thrive in your world and believe that there is happiness after abuse - I am living proof!!! May all survivors find their courage to speak out about their pain and tell their story so others will learn. Find your happiness in life, it is there!!!!