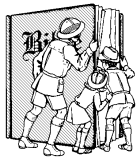


**Our Mother of Good Counsel Religious Education Program
2025-2026**

Dear Parents:

Our Family Handbook is posted on our parish website, www.omgccc.org. Click on the Religious Education tab, and you will find it. Please read the handbook on line, then sign and return this signature page to the Faith Formation Office, or send it to RE Class with your child.

We appreciate you spending a few minutes reading our Family Handbook which contains several revised policies.



Signing below will acknowledge that I have received and reviewed a copy of all enclosed Parish and Diocesan Policies. I understand that I am responsible to become familiar with the contents of all enclosed documents and revised policies. I agree to abide by and to conduct myself in complete accord with them.

Parent(s) signature: _____

Date: _____

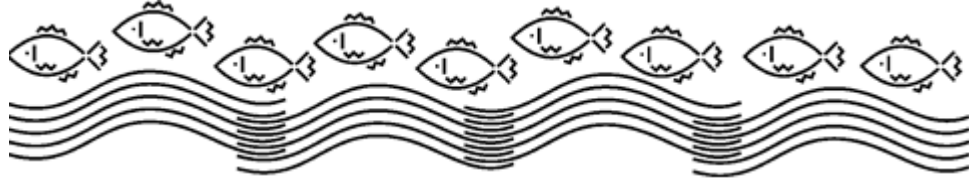
Child/Children's
Name(s): _____

Grade(s): _____

Emergency Phone Number on Class Nights: _____

Do your children have any medical conditions of which we need to be aware?
This would include any food allergies, allergic reactions to insect bites, asthma, hearing or vision special needs, etc.

If so, please list each child separately below:



Religious Education Program Family Handbook 2025-2026



Our Mother of Good Counsel Parish

***16043 South Bell Road
Homer Glen, IL 60491***

**Faith Formation Office: (708)301-0214
Religious Education Cell Phone: (708)288-8265
R. E. Cell used on Wednesdays Only**

Janet Litterio----Faithformation@omgccc.org

Parish Website: www.omgccc.org

Class Location

**Homer Junior High School
15711 Bell Road
Homer Glen**

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***Our Mother of Good Counsel
Religious Education Schedule 2025-2026***

Wednesdays PER SCHEDULE BELOW
Classes held at Homer Jr. High 6pm until 7:30pm

Wednesday, September 3, 2025- 6pm Mass- Church	January 7, 2026-CLASS
September 10, 2025-CLASS	January 14, 2026-CLASS
September 17, 2025-CLASS	January 21, 2026-CLASS
September 24, 2025—OFF	January 28, 2026-OFF
October 1, 2025-CLASS	February 4, 2026-CLASS
October 8, 2025-CLASS	February 11, 2026-CLASS
October 15, 2025-CLASS	February 18, 2026-CLASS-OFF-Ash Wednesday
October 22, 2025-CLASS	February 25, 2026-CLASS
October 29, 2025-OFF	
November 5, 2025-CLASS	March 4, 2026-CLASS
November 12, 2025-CLASS	March 11, 2026-CLASS
November 19, 2025-CLASS	March 18, 2026-CLASS
November 26, 2025-NO CLASS	March 25, 2026-- Reconciliation Gr. 3-8-CHURCH
December 3, 2025-CLASS	
December 10, 2025-CLASS	
December 17, 2025 Reconciliation Gr. 3-8-CHURCH	

Sacramental Preparation Dates to Remember

GRADE 2 REQUIRED PARENT GATHERINGS AND SACRAMENT SCHEDULE

*First Reconciliation and Communion Required Parent Gathering
Wednesday, January 28, 2025 6pm in church*

First Reconciliation—Thursday, April 23, 2026 6pm in church

*First Communion Practice in Church –Thursday, April 23, 2026 after First Reconciliation
First Communion Saturday, April 25, 2026 11am in church*

GRADE 7 CONFIRMATION PREPARATION REQUIRED PARENT GATHERING

(Note: The Sacrament of Confirmation is received in 8th Grade)

Wednesday September 24, 2025 6pm in church
Student Commitment Weekend at 4pm, 10:30am Masses—October 11, and 12, 2025

GRADE 8 CONFIRMATION RETREAT FOR STUDENTS

RETREAT DATE: Sunday, January 25, 2026 2pm in church
Confirmation Confessions followed by Practice-TBD
Confirmation-TBD

Evangelization and Faith Formation

Our working motto is,
***“What you do I cannot do. What I do you cannot do.
But together you and I can do something beautiful for God.”***

Because we are Baptized Catholic Christians, we are called to Evangelize.
Evangelizing means spreading Jesus’ messages in The Gospels.

We do not stand on soapboxes to evangelize.

Rather, we show people through our actions and how we treat others. We lead by following Jesus’ example using our unique gifts and talents that God has blessed each of us with.

Our goal is to have people come to know Jesus and
want to learn more about Him.



Philosophy of Religious Education

Religious Education is a process of living and sharing the teachings of our Catholic Faith. We do this by incorporating the teachings of Jesus into practice in our lives, through our relationships with our families, our parish and our community.

Spiritual understanding and growth must begin in the home. Parents, as you teach your children so many things as they grow, let us remember that you, parents, are the first religious educators of your children. Our catechists and aides build on what is learned in your home. By the time your child reaches first grade, they have a solid foundation, because you share our faith with them. We commend you for that, as we then begin to build upon the foundation you have set in your home.

Along with the weekly lesson, we will guide and teach our young people to obtain a more enriched understanding of our faith and show them how to incorporate their faith into their everyday lives.

Our Mother of Good Counsel Religious Education Program is designed to provide our children with basic Catholic teaching. We strive to help our young people develop a deeper understanding of their faith through prayer, study, art, song, and religious oriented activities.

Our program exists to support our families as they guide their children in the understanding and practice of their faith. It is essential that parents join in covenant with our RE Program by incorporating our Catholic faith into daily life, and most importantly—

Attend weekend Mass together as a family.

Parent Formation

Our Parish has become a partner in an exciting 24/7 web-based digital formation series called **FORMED**. This series is designed to help adults and children grow in our faith at all age levels. Access is **FREE** by signing up. We strongly urge you to take advantage of this excellent resource to learn more about our faith, so you not only live it out more deeply, but share it with others.

How to register:

- Go to Formed.org, click sign up
- Under Find Your Parish, type in Our Mother of Good Counsel
- Click next, then create your account typing your name and email address, then click sign up
- Start enjoying THE best Catholic content all in one place!

Program Expectations

We strive to provide a quality religious educational experience for our students, including a study of our Catholic beliefs and scripture, prayer and worship, along with community service.

Enrollment

The Religious Education Program at Our Mother of Good Counsel Parish is available to children of registered families in grades 1 through 8.

Attendance

For the safety of the children, we do keep accurate attendance records. Please call the Faith Formation Office at (708) 301-0214 before 4:30 PM on class days to report an absence. If you call after 4:30, please leave a message on the voice mail. If you have not called your child's absence into the Faith Formation Office, we will call your home after attendance is collected. This is done for the safety of the children, as well as to remind you of the next class date.

If there is an order of protection on any child, please notify the Faith Formation Office.

Missed Lessons

We can understand absences for illness, or a family emergency. Sports participation or extra activities are not legitimate reasons for missing class. If your child misses three consecutive classes, the Faith Formation Director will contact you to ensure lessons are covered at home. Students must make up all class work when absent. In Grades 1-6, missed lessons will be given to the students upon returning to class. In Grades 7-8, lessons covered in class are expected to be completed by the student prior to his or her return.

Tardy Students

Children must arrive on time and stay for the entire session. If your child is tardy he/ she must have a note explaining the circumstances. The Program Director, on an individual basis, will handle excessive tardiness.

Early Dismissal Policy

For safety reasons, we will not allow any child to leave class early without proper authorization. If your child must leave early, parents must come into the school and sign out their child. Under no circumstances will children be allowed to leave the school and walk to meet parents elsewhere. Children are not allowed to leave class early to attend other activities.

Emergency School Closings

In the event of the closing of School District 33-C, Religious Education Classes are automatically cancelled. Your child's Catechist or Aide will call your home as soon as they are notified in the event it becomes necessary to cancel classes. You may also check www.emergencyclosings.com or our parish website, www.omgccc.org should it become necessary to cancel class. In addition, you should receive a blast email from the Faith Formation Office.

Parent Sacramental Meetings

The yearly Sacramental Parent Meetings are mandatory and meant for the parents of children who are preparing to receive Reconciliation, First Communion, along with the beginning of Confirmation Prep which begins in 7th grade. **Students need not attend this meeting.** These meetings will answer all of your questions regarding preparation and reception of these Sacraments, and will be held in our Church. More importantly, a theological overview of each Sacrament will be presented so parents can more fully understand each Sacrament and share their understanding with their family. Please check the yearly calendar included in this handbook for the date and time. Information distributed at these meetings will not be given to students.

Behavior Policy

Each student is expected to follow a code of conduct that is exemplary of Catholic values. This dictates that students show proper respect for themselves, all adults, fellow students, school property, and program rules. Each Catechist will make known his or her expectations for the classroom. **We have a zero tolerance policy with regard to bullying, breaking or disrupting anything in the classrooms, bathrooms or hallways at Homer Jr. High, lying and being disrespectful to adults or other students. If there is an issue with a student, the child will be sent to the Faith Formation Director and a phone call home will be made. If there is one additional infraction, the Director has the authority to have parents seek alternate means of religious education effective immediately. Please discuss these policies with your children.**

General Rules

1. **Everyone** will be treated with respect and courtesy.
2. **The use of electronic devices of any kind is banned during class time.**
3. School and personal property will be treated with respect. Parents will be notified about any damage to property and will be required to pay for the damage.
4. Under no circumstances should anything be removed from any desks or counters. Nothing in any of the Junior High classrooms may be disturbed. Taking items that belong to someone else will result in disciplinary action up to and including finding alternate means of religious education.
5. Violence or fighting may result in dismissal from classes.
6. Students will not interfere with another student's right to learn, nor a Catechist's right to teach.
7. Students are expected to complete assignments given by Catechists. Parents will be contacted when assignments are not complete.
8. Eating and drinking are **not** allowed in any classroom or hallway in the school
9. **All participants are expected to arrive on time and stay for the entire class.**

Cell Phones/Electronic Devices

It has become necessary to establish a policy on using electronic devices once your children enter the building, including using devices during class time. This does not restrict the children making calls once they are out of the building. The policy is to assure uninterrupted class time for both the students and the catechists.

The use of ANY portable electronic device is BANNED during class time.

If your child brings any electronic device (cell phone), they will be required to deposit them in a container when they enter the class room, and pick them up at the conclusion of class.

Student Dress Code

In keeping with the partnership between our parish and Homer Jr. High, we agree to comply with the student dress code of District 33C. In compliance with Homer 33C Board Policy, the responsibility for the appearance of students rests with the parents and students themselves. Clothes worn should be neat and clean. Any form of dress determined to disrupt the education process, or to be distracting to the purpose and conduct of the RE Program will not be permitted. Dress and grooming will be neat and in keeping with health, sanitary and safety requirements. Clothing, jewelry, or markings (on clothes or person) which promote or depict violence, drugs, sexual content, or gang affiliation or thereof, will not be tolerated.

The following dress items and styles are prohibited:

- ☐ Headgear worn in the building (hats, scarves, bandanas, visors, etc.) by students and/or adults.
- ☐ Pants and overalls worn below the waist or inappropriately worn.
- ☐ Shoes with pop out wheels or detachable wheels.

Drugs, Alcohol, Weapons

Our Mother of Good Counsel Parish prohibits using, passing or selling tobacco, alcohol, drugs, or other narcotics in any form. Matches, lighters, sharp objects, or weapons are strictly prohibited. A violation of this rule will result in disciplinary action up to and including finding alternate means of Religious Education.

Dispensing Medication

We cannot be responsible for administering medication. If your child has a medical condition where medication is needed, please notify the Faith Formation Office.

Arrival and Departure

Please plan to arrive at Homer Junior High about 5-10 minutes before class begins. Students should go straight to their classroom, but may not enter the classroom until the Catechist or Aide arrives. Children are not allowed in a classroom unless an adult is present. If a parent opts to walk their child into the building, all adults must **ENTER** and **EXIT** through the **main entrance—Door A**. Entering and exiting through Door B is strictly prohibited. **RE Staff are stationed at this exit to ensure no one enters/exits using Door B.**

With departure, we ask you to exercise caution. Please heed the directions given by the Traffic Controllers. They deserve courtesy and respect when directing you where to enter the lot, and where to park to wait for your children. **DO NOT PARK IN THE DESIGNATED HANDICAPPED SPACES WITHOUT PROPER AUTHORIZATION AS THESE SPACES ARE NOT ALLOCATED FOR YOUR CONVENIENCE. THEY ARE A NECESSITY FOR THOSE WHO NEED THEM. TICKETS WILL BE ISSUED TO THOSE PARKING ILLEGALLY. USING CELL PHONES ON SCHOOL PROPERTY MAY RESULT IN TICKETING.** We must control access to the building for security measures—another level of security to keep our children safe, therefore **we ask parents to wait outside the school when picking up their children.** We appreciate your cooperation with our dismissal policy.

Dismissal Procedure

Grades 5 through 8—dismissed through Exit A at 7:25.

Grades 1 through 4—dismissed through the main entrance-Exit A at 7:30.

SAFETY is Our Primary Concern

Therefore the following points may help

Be **PATIENT** and practice **PATIENCE**

Exercise Extreme Caution

Volunteer to be a Traffic Monitor.

Religious Education Curriculum

The curriculum of our program is based on the belief that learning one's faith is a process that includes not only a structured program, but also an opportunity for each child to live and practice our faith within our parish community. What we teach must be reinforced by the family's practice of their faith. This goal can best be achieved through a strong partnership between parish and home.

Our program may include written homework for the upper grades. After each session, all children will bring home their books containing their work for the evening, and possibly a handout for you to read which explains their lesson. Please read and discuss these with your children, and make every effort to help your children grow in their faith. There may be periodic assessments of the students' understanding of classroom material. This serves a two-fold purpose: to assess the Catechist's presentation of material as well as to ensure that each child is giving their attention to the material that is being presented. These expectations will be reflected in the Student Evaluations that will be completed and shared with parents mid-year. At certain specified intervals, students will be asked to individually recite a prayer the class has been practicing. The children will have ample time to prepare for this. This will be done in a friendly, positive manner.

Prayers and Beliefs to Know

Grades 1-8

Sign of the Cross
Glory Be
Hail Mary
Our Father
Prayer Before & After Meals
Guardian Angel Prayer

Grades 2-8

Act Of Contrition
Apostle's Creed
Seven Sacraments
Ten Commandments

Grades 4-8

The Beatitudes
Parts of the Mass
4 Marks of the Church

Grades 5-8

Stations of the Cross
Spiritual Works of Mercy
Corporal Works of Mercy
The Rosary

Texts and Materials

ALL FAMILIES ARE ASKED TO HAVE A BIBLE AT HOME FOR THE USE OF BOTH CHILDREN AND FAMILY.

Grades 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6

Students will use “Blest Are We” Faith in Action Edition, published by Silver Burdett Ginn/RCL Benziger. This is a program designed specifically for religious education of students who do not attend parochial schools.

Please ensure that your child brings their book to class each week.

Lost books must be replaced for a charge of \$25 replacement fee. Children in grades 1-6 will need to bring a pencil, a folder and their textbook to each class. Students in grade 6 will need to purchase “The Compass Bible for Catholic Teens” through the FF Office upon enrollment for the 2024-2025 school year. This Bible is the property of each student and will be used in Grades 6, 7 and 8. If this Bible is lost, another copy must be purchased for student’s use.

Grade 2 Sacramental Preparation

Students in Grade 2 will be prepared for Reconciliation using the text “Pardon and Peace” by RCL Benziger. First Communion prep will use the text “We Give Thanks and Praise” by the same publisher. First Reconciliation will be celebrated a week or so before First Communion which will be celebrated in May. Please refer to the yearly schedule included in this handbook for specific dates and times.

Grades 7-8

Students will use the “Christ Our Life” series published by Loyola Press. **Students in 7th and 8th grades need to bring their text, and pen to each class.** A Confirmation Preparation Booklet will be given to each student which will explain the various responsibilities and aspects of Confirmation, including service hours. This Confirmation Booklet will be given to each student in 7th grade and will be used over a two-year period. **Service hours for eighth graders must be completed by March 1, and the hours must be turned in to their RE teachers by their first RE class in March. Seventh graders can turn in their hours by their last RE class of the year.**

Students in Grades 7 and 8 will prepare for Confirmation. Confirmation is celebrated in the spring of 8th grade. The Bishop’s Office sets the date for Confirmation. Therefore, the dates change from year to year. Information will be sent home with your 8th grader when our office receives the date from the Bishop’s Office

Parent Conferences

Catechists will schedule conferences with parents at their discretion. Parents may request a conference with their child's Catechist or the Program Director at any time. Parents are welcome to speak with their child's Catechist before or immediately after any scheduled class. We simply ask that you stop and let the Director know so she may inform the Catechist.

The Role of Parents

It is expected that parents will involve themselves in their child's progress in the following ways: attending Mass regularly, helping with home activity assignments, praying traditional and personal prayers regularly, attending special sacrament meetings & events, taking an interest in their child's curriculum, involving your child as the family extends concern and service to neighbors and community. We need all parents to volunteer in some capacity. Parents are asked to participate actively in the program for volunteer needs such as traffic, front desk, catechists and aides. Sharing your time and talents are vital to the success of forming our treasures, which of course are your children.

Sacramental Preparation

Preparation for the Sacraments of Reconciliation, Communion, and Confirmation is an important part of your child's faith formation. Parent and family participation is indispensable in the spiritual growth of your child. Participation at weekend Masses is the best preparation for these Sacraments.

It is imperative that families practice their faith.

One parent or adult family member must participate in the Sacramental Preparation Meetings which will be held in our Church. Please check the yearly schedule, our weekly Parish Bulletin, and our Parish website for specific date and time.

Children must attend Religious Education Classes for two consecutive years prior to the reception of Reconciliation and Communion. Children must attend Religious Education classes for two consecutive years prior to the reception of the Sacrament of Confirmation.

Faith formation is an ongoing experience and learning process for the entire family. Each year builds upon the past. Therefore, children should attend Religious Education classes throughout grade school.

Registration for Religious Education

In order to adequately plan for each school year, we ask you to register your children each year. Toward the end of March, registration packets will be mailed to your home. We will not assume that your child will be attending classes in the fall unless he/she has re-enrolled. New parishioners may enroll their children into our program at any time.

We do ask that parents provide us with a copy of their child's Baptismal Certificate upon enrollment, or at the latest, prior to the first class in September.

Tuition Payment Policy

We will have a packet/class assignment and textbook pick up weekend a few weeks before classes begin. This will be held before and after all weekend Masses. As stated, classroom assignments and student texts will be distributed during this time. The balance of your tuition may be paid at any time prior to the first class date. You may simply mail your payment to the FF Office, or place it in the weekend collection in an envelope marked "Religious Education."

Children will not be accepted into next year's classes unless all back tuition has been paid or special arrangements have been made. Please contact the Faith Formation Office if there are financial difficulties and we will be happy to work with you.

ONE-HALF OF THE TOTAL OF TUITION AND FEES MUST BE PAID UPON REGISTRATION

	<u>Prior to June 30</u>	<u>July 1—Aug. 31-Base Rate</u>	<u>Sept. 1 and later</u>
1 Child	\$270.00	\$320.00	\$355.00
2 Children	\$350.00	\$400.00	\$435.00
3 or more Children	\$400.00	\$450.00	\$485.00

Additional Fees (per child):

Grade 2—First Eucharist Fee	\$50.00
Grade 6—Bible Fee	\$15.00
Grade 8—Confirmation/Retreat Fee	\$50.00



Catechists

Catechists are adults from our parish who have responded to God's call to share our faith with our children. Please prayerfully consider whether God is calling **YOU** to use your gifts and talents to share our faith through this enriching and rewarding ministry.

Initial training and ongoing formation for this rewarding ministry are provided through the Joliet Diocese. Please contact the Faith Formation Office if you plan to attend. It is highly recommended that catechists attend a Catechist Formation session.

To maintain compliance with the requirements handed down by the Joliet Diocese, all volunteers in our program must provide proof of having attended the "Protecting God's Children" workshop. Also, per Diocesan policy, all volunteers must undergo a background check. All safe environment sessions are now done on line through Virtus.org.

The Parish Church and Family Church Partners in Faith

As Catholic families, your daily life is a true expression of your faith. Your faith is not complete by itself. It should be united with and supported by your fellow parishioners. Christ has called you to Himself in and through the sacraments. Therefore, you share in one and the same mission that He gives to the whole Church.

Church teaching summarizes the mission of the family in four distinct, interdependent tasks:

- * Families form living communities
- * Families serve life by bearing and educating children
- * Families participate in building a caring and just society
- * Families share in the life and mission of the Church

You Make this Mission Of Christ Happen By.....

- ♦ Sharing the Catholic Faith Story
 - ♦ Celebrating Rituals
- ♦ Enriching Family Relationships
- ♦ Responding to Those in Need
 - ♦ Praying Together

In the U.S. Bishop's Pastoral letter, "Follow the Way of Love," they further express how families live out their Christian Mission of Baptism.

You believe in God and that God cares about you.

You love and never give up believing in the value of another person.

You are united to one another through relationships of intimacy.

You evangelize by professing faith in God and living by the Gospel values and set an example of Christian living for your children and others.

You educate, since as primary teachers of your children, you impart knowledge of faith and help them learn the values for Christian living.

You pray together, thanking God for blessings, and asking for strength and guidance in times of doubt and crisis.

You serve one another, often sacrificing your own wants for the other's good.

You forgive and seek reconciliation.

You celebrate life as you gather for meals; you break bread and share stories, becoming more fully the community of Christ.

You come together for special family celebrations, when tragedy strikes and in joyful celebration of the sacraments.

You welcome the stranger, the lonely, and the grieving person into your home.

You give drink to the thirsty and food to the hungry. The Gospel assures us that when we do this; they are strangers no more, but Christ.

You act justly in your community when you treat others with respect, stand up against discrimination and racism, and work to overcome hunger, poverty, homelessness and illiteracy

You affirm life as a precious gift from God when you oppose whatever destroys life such as abortion, capital punishment, neighborhood and domestic violence, poverty and racism.

**The following
documents are
DIOCESAN
POLICIES**

PLEASE

READ

Information for Lesson Leaders: Educators, Parents and Safe Adults

As caring adults, we have the great responsibility of ensuring the safety of children and youth. The prevention of child sexual abuse requires more than adult awareness, education, and training about the nature and scope of the problem. We must also give children and youth the tools they need to help us keep them safe by educating them regarding boundaries, safe and unsafe behaviors and healthy relationships. Research shows that child sexual abuse prevention is most effective when there is a partnership between parents and Lesson Leaders, when material is reiterated in a school setting, and when the training is interactive and activity-based. Research based and evidence informed, the *Empowering God's Children®* is an age-appropriate comprehensive program through which Lesson Leaders (teachers, catechists, youth ministers, etc.) and parents partner to give children and youth the tools they need to protect themselves and know what to do if someone tries to violate their boundaries. All materials are available in English and Spanish.

Each year, the program provides a theme that introduces and builds on the basic concepts of the *Teaching Boundaries and Safety Guide*. The material is developmentally appropriate for each age group and includes content and activities that reinforce the message. Within each lesson plan is the ability to tailor the activities and messaging to meet the diverse needs of the children and youth at all levels.

WHAT'S INCLUDED:

- *The Teaching Boundaries and Safety Guide*
 - An extensive resource booklet specifically for parents to guide meaningful and effective conversations regarding child sexual abuse. The booklet also helps adults learn how to educate the children and youth in their care, and how to evaluate the safety of adults who interact with children and youth. Lesson Leaders should also be aware of this content that is discussed with parents to better inform lesson planning.
- *Children's Programs Lesson Leader Orientation and Certification Training module*
 - A training module specifically for Lesson Leaders (educators) and parents to provide foundational knowledge of how to teach children and youth about their boundaries and safety. This training module also includes information to prepare adults for handling disclosures of abuse or other harm appropriately. Please inquire with your local or diocesan coordinator for access to this important module.
- Age-appropriate lesson plans for four specific age groups (with optional Pre-K and Teen Peer Leader Lessons):

Grades K-2

Grades 3-5

Grades 6-8

Grades 9-12

The materials provided feature everything needed to prepare for and present each lesson—including additional information to help Lesson Leaders better understand the context of the materials they are about to present. For example, Lesson Leaders have access to a glossary of terms and guiding notes throughout each lesson. They also have handouts and other reference materials—such as an introductory video, information on how to respond to disclosures, how to report suspected abuse, and other supplemental materials.

The lessons can be presented in either a three-year, or six-year, cycle. Throughout the lessons, each child or youth receives the full range of information from the *Teaching Boundaries and Safety Guide* in small, “digestible” bites.

Even though the topic of each lesson plan is different, every lesson includes core safety messaging to provide children and youth the basic safety information they need to frequently hear.



Breakdown of Lesson Plan Topics:

Each year, children and youth will receive one or two of the following lesson plans (depending on whether a diocese utilizes a 3-year or 6-year cycle):

- Lesson 1** **Physical Boundaries: Safe and Unsafe Touching Rules.** Students learn simple rules about what to do and how to react when someone's touch is confusing, scary, or makes the child or young person feel uncomfortable. Young people start to deal with the real risks they face when they are out in the world and on their own, and they begin to learn where to draw boundary lines in relationships.
- Lesson 2** **Safe Adults, Safe Touches and Special Safe Adults.** Children, young people, and their parents establish basic guidelines for working together to make certain *which* friends and other adults in their environment can be trusted to act safely and in the best interest of each child or young person.
- Lesson 3** **Boundaries: You Have Rights!** Children must understand they have a right to be safe, and they are allowed to create boundaries to protect themselves in situations where they feel uncomfortable, or where they could be harmed.
- Lesson 4** **Secrets, Surprises and Promises.** Children must learn how to respect their own health and safety, and that of others, by understanding the safety rules about secrets. They have a right to be safe, and they are allowed to create boundaries to protect themselves in situations that cause discomfort or violate the safety rules.
- Lesson 5** **Being a Safe Friend.** Children must know that being a friend means that we “do the right thing” when it comes to healthy friendships with their peers: meaning we recognize unsafe situations, intervene (when possible) and get the information to a safe adult.
- Lesson 6** **Boundaries: Feelings and Facts.** Through this lesson, the adult Lesson Leader teaches students specifically about boundaries, what unsafe situations could potentially feel like, and what to do in response if they feel uncomfortable or are in an unsafe situation.



Each lesson for each age group includes the following:

- Instructions to help the Lesson Leader—the teacher, catechist, or youth minister prepare to deliver the lesson.
- Helpful teaching support from the Catechism to give the teacher or catechist a framework for keeping the lesson within the context of Church tradition and theology.
- A learning goal, including expected learning outcomes for students.
- An overview for creating a successful learning experience for the specific age group.
- Key vocabulary words and definitions that apply to the lesson. These words empower children and young people with the distinctions they need to help recognize inappropriate behavior by those with whom they interact.
- A short introductory video for three specific age groups, K–5, 6–8 and 9–12, designed to provide a simple overview of safe and unsafe behaviors and people.
- Multiple activity options with instructions (and appropriate handouts for students as needed to take home and further discuss with parents).
- A closing group prayer that reflects the key message of the lesson.

The lessons focus on an age-appropriate discussion of safety, relative to the specific roles that different people play in a child's life. All lessons stress the importance of the child's right to be safe, keeping private body parts “private,” and of telling a trusted adult about anyone's behavior that causes a child to feel uncomfortable or threatened.

Practical Advice for Parents

On Preventing Child Sexual Abuse

A Resource Provided to You Through the Protecting God's Children® Program



EDITOR'S NOTE: Parenting is the most influential responsibility an adult undertakes in life. It is also the one job for which adults receive the least amount of training. Society expects parents to know what to do, to always take appropriate actions, and to behave daily in a manner that provides a wonderful role model for their children. However, society does not provide parents the tools and skills they need to live up to these expectations. The National Catholic Risk Retention Group, Inc., provides parents with this free handbook to help them focus on practical steps designed to help protect children from sexual abuse. This handbook was produced for our Protecting God's Children program as a part of our VIRTUS® programs.

The first step to protecting children from sexual abuse is educating parents about the nature of the problem. Awareness about child sexual abuse—what it is and who commits it—opens the door to some simple steps parents can take to protect children. No one has more at stake or a more vested interest in protecting children than the people who gave them life. Awareness, education, and responsible parenting give a child the best tools for her or his defense—and the child may be more likely to tell an adult if something happens.

The Protecting God's Children program is designed for adults in our faith community—to raise their awareness about the nature of child sexual abuse, to educate them on how to recognize the warning signs, and to train them about what to do when they suspect a child is being victimized. The program includes awareness sessions, videos, web-based training modules, online training bulletins, and other programs specifically designed to assist parents and other adults.

The first of two centerpiece videos, *A Time to Protect God's Children*, presents an accurate, clear, and effective introduction to the subject of child sexual abuse. Awareness usually gives rise to the question: "What can I do?" The second video, *A Plan to Protect God's Children*, trains adults to recognize some of the primary symptoms of child sexual abuse and what to do if a child reports abuse.

We recognize that parents need practical advice. Parents bear the primary responsibility for the safety and well-being of their children. Here are some practical actions that parents can take to help protect their children from sexual abuse:

1. By virtue of their physical size, adults have power over children—and that increases a child's vulnerability. For example, parents and other authority figures teach children to "obey adults." When children hear this message, they may interpret it to mean that *all* adults have the authority to tell *all* children what to do, *all* the time. If this is a child's interpretation, then the message has created additional vulnerability for the child. Yet, some simple, common sense steps can help minimize a child's vulnerability. For example:

- Do NOT insist that children hug or kiss relatives or friends. Let children express affection on their own terms.



- Let children know that their feelings are important to you. Intervene if you notice that your child is uncomfortable doing something that another adult asks him or her to do. Let the child know that you will protect him or her from this discomfort. That doesn't necessarily mean that you should let children off the hook when it comes to doing their chores or cleaning up a mess they've made.
2. Learn to recognize and take advantage of teachable moments with children. Be willing to openly discuss sensitive issues. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends the following age-appropriate conversations with children:
- From ages 18 months to 3 years—begin teaching children the proper names for all body parts.
 - Ages 3 to 5 years—teach children about private body parts and how to say “no” to anyone who touches them in a way that makes them feel uncomfortable. Give them direct answers to questions about sex.
 - Ages 5 to 8 years—talk about good touches and bad touches, and safety away from home.
 - Ages 8 to 12 years—focus on personal safety issues.
 - Ages 13 to 18 years—discuss issues such as rape, date rape, HIV, other sexually transmitted diseases, and unintended pregnancy. There are also professionals in the community who can provide assistance with forming age-appropriate responses to children's questions and concerns. Remember, regardless of the child's age: **Take advantage of teachable moments.**
3. Games are a great way to reinforce the lessons you teach your children about safety issues. For example, children are always asking parents, “What if?” Using this same game, parents can raise their own concerns and encourage their children to *think* and *make decisions* relying on the lessons they have learned.
4. Teach children to say, “Stop it,” to instructions that might encourage them to do things that they *really* do not want to do. Reinforce the rule that children should say, “Stop it,” to requests or demands that make them uncomfortable, even if they *think* they should obey. A discussion of these rules can teach a child that there are some times when it is okay to say, “Stop it,” and other times when it is okay to go along with the instructions. Everything hinges on context. Parents must teach their children how to discern between an *appropriate* request and an *inappropriate* request.
- For example, it is appropriate to follow the instruction to “Be nice,” as long as the instruction is within an appropriate context, such as, “Be nice and don't throw things at the other children.” But, tell children it's okay to disobey this request if, for example, someone says, “Be nice and take off your clothes.”
5. Know where children spend their time. Get to know the adults who show up at the various locations in the community where children gather and where they play together. Be wary of any adult who seems more interested in creating a relationship with a child than with other adults. Pay attention when an adult seems to single out a particular child for a relationship or for special attention. Warning signs include treats, gifts, vacations, or other special favors offered only to one specific child.
6. Make unannounced visits to the child's nursery, babysitter, daycare center, or school. When choosing a nursery, daycare center, or school, make sure that there are no areas where children play or work that are “off limits” to parents. Taking these actions raises awareness among caregivers, and reinforces the responsibility they have for the safety of the children in their charge.



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7. Find out if the child's school or church religious education programs include a sex abuse prevention curriculum. If not, volunteer to be on a committee to establish such a program. Work with teachers to review available programs and make recommendations to school administrators. Talk with other parents about supporting the addition of child sexual abuse prevention material to existing child safety programs.



Do NOT allow a child to go alone on “vacation” with *any* adult other than the child's parent.

Do NOT allow a child to spend the night alone with *any* adult other than the child's parent or another **safe** adult.ⁱ

Except in the case of a serious emergency, Do NOT allow a child to travel alone—even for a very short distance—with *any* adult other than the child's parent or another **safe** adult. You should also prohibit children from accepting expensive gifts from an adult, particularly if one child is singled out for special attention.

Parents can make an important difference. However, without a supporting organization to help bring together a community's resources, experts, and commitment, parents are limited in their ability to impact community-wide child abuse prevention. That's where we can help.

The Church can join with parents to build a society where children are no longer at risk of being sexually abused, where those who have been victimized can find the resources and courage to heal, and where all people live together in loving, supportive relationships.

Resources:

Child Sexual Abuse: What It Is and How to Prevent It, American Academy of Pediatrics, 1999.

Adams, C., and Fay, J., *No More Secrets: Protecting Your Child From Sexual Abuse*, Impact Publishers, Ninth Printing, 1991.

Practical Advice for Parents on Preventing Child Sexual Abuse

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ⁱ “Safe adult” is a special designation used in the VIRTUS *Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Program for Parents and Guardians* to describe adults who have demonstrated that they behave in a safe manner when interacting with children.

OBJECTIVES

Through this lesson, youth will develop a better understanding of healthy and unhealthy relationships. Following the lesson, youth will be able to:

- Identify the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationships.
- Follow a plan to “do the right thing” for themselves and others if they recognize an unhealthy situation
- Communicate regarding concerns of unsafe situations.

Lesson 1**We begin with boundaries.**

Effective safety programs begin with education and understanding. Whether we are learning about bicycle safety, fire safety, or safe environments, the key to creating and maintaining personal safety is understanding what can happen and knowing how things really work.

Boundaries are the starting point. Learning about them and safety rules begins with young children and continues throughout life. The more we know about boundaries, the more we can protect ourselves and others.

It is not a youth’s role to protect other children—that is the job of adults. However, there are some things that youth, who are employees or assisting in volunteer capacities, can do to help.

What are boundaries?

Boundaries can be viewed as imaginary lines that separate one person from another.

- They promote our sense of “self” and help us preserve personal integrity while creating a framework for our relationships with others
- They can be physical, emotional, behavioral, verbal and spiritual
- They are formed during our early years as we model the behavior we witness from influential adults in our lives
- Boundaries differ depending on the relationship; boundaries between married couples are different from those between friends, and boundaries between children and parents are different from those between students and teachers/coaches

It is important for children and youth to know they have the right to speak up if something does not seem right to them—even if it concerns an adult. “No” is a very powerful word and an effective way to set a boundary, and it should be respected.

Use the terminology of “safe” and “unsafe” touches:

When discussing safety involving touch, a child should begin to discern the kind of touch that nurtures them versus touch that harms, it is best to talk about it in the terms of safety. For that reason, we shall use the terms “safe touch” and “unsafe touch.”

Youth should know examples of specific, “safe” physical touches:

The difference between safe and unsafe is tied to both the purpose and intention of the touch.

Safe touches are safe because they have a good purpose and are not intended to hurt. They are safe even when not knowing the person well, as long as the touches are appropriate to the relationship.

Examples include:

- “Cheek” kisses from Mom before bedtime

- Hugs from Dad after work
- “High fives” with friends during a game
- Shaking hands with someone new
- A loose hug from a teacher in class
- A pat on the back/shoulder from a coach
- Having Grandma/Grandpa bounce you on the knee
- A pat on the head by an Uncle
- Sitting on Dad’s shoulders

Safe touches that might feel unpleasant or painful:

Touches from doctors, nurses, dentists and “Dr. Mom” need special explanation because they are safe and necessary, and can sometimes hurt. Even so, they hurt for a good reason because they are meant to keep the children and youth healthy. Examples include when:

- The doctor gave you stitches after you fell off the bike
- The nurse gave you an immunization shot for health
- The dentist cleaned your teeth to keep cavities away
- Mom applied stinging ointment to a cut to fight infection
- Dad put drops in your eyes to flush out grains of sand
- Your brother pulled your arm to keep you from going into the busy street

Unsafe touches:

- Are meant to hurt, scare, or confuse, or, they violate the safety rules
- Examples children will recognize right away include hitting, punching, tripping, kicking and spitting
- This can also be any touches that make children feel uncomfortable or uneasy
- Includes any molestation
- Also include any touching of private parts—except in very limited and specific circumstances to keep the child safe and healthy

Anytime youth are confused by any touch, they should speak up and ask someone they trust about it, or, talk to someone who is supposed to be safe, such as a guidance counselor, supervisory adult, safe adult, parents, etc. This helps to determine whether a touch is safe or unsafe, and helps the youth to learn that working it out with a safe adult is the best way to deal with any confusion or discomfort.

Focus on the behavior:

Knowing who is safe is not always easy because most of the people who abuse children are known and trusted by the children and their parents. Almost 90% of the people who abuse children are in this group. This is why it is so important to focus on behavior.

Behavior of safe adults:

- Will not hurt the child without a good reason, and will not intentionally confuse or scare the child
- Consistently respect the safety wishes and concerns of the child and parent/guardian
- Exhibit behavior that is transparent and PAN: Public, Appropriate and Non-sexual in nature

Behavior of unsafe adults:

- Do not listen to the boundaries of the youth
- Do not follow the rules, especially when it comes to being alone with a youth
- Ask a child to keep a secret or to “keep this between you and me”
- Give gifts, without knowledge or permission of a parent/guardian
- Give unsafe touches, that are confusing, scary, or that hurt, or that violate the safety rules
- Perform unsafe behavior that makes a child feel uncomfortable or uneasy

“No, go and tell” when boundaries are violated:

Children also need an action plan for safety when the rules are violated. In the same way that children learn to, “stop, drop, and roll” in a fire, when someone violates their boundaries they need to know about, “No, go and tell.” Children have the right to say words that mean “no” to anyone who is making them feel uncomfortable.

Then the child should try to get away from the situation and tell a trusted adult what happened. “No, go and tell” can make a difference in whether a child is harmed by a predator. Give them the tools and the freedom to take these actions.

Boundary safety rules:

- Children should say “No!” or “Stop!” or other words that mean “no”
- Try to remove themselves from the situation
- Tell a parent or another safe adult as soon as possible

Confronting an adult may be hard for some children. Here are some ideas of things they can say to get away from the situation when, “Stop touching me that way; I don’t like it!” is not the safest or easiest choice.

What children could say to get away from a scary or uncomfortable situation:

- “I don’t feel well, I’m going to throw up.”
- “Leave me alone, I’m telling my mom/dad.”
- “I need to use the restroom.”
- “I’m thirsty and need something to drink.”
- “My mom is waiting for me, I need to go now.”

When children know about the boundary safety rules, and have words to say to communicate about what has happened to them to the right person, they learn that it’s OK to talk about these subjects. And, they are more likely to challenge an inappropriate touch or speak up when someone leaves them feeling uncomfortable. Youth have a right to be safe.

Older youth and teens often disclose to their peers about abuse that is happening, or has happened to them, and do not always communicate about abusive situations to adults.

Sometimes it can be confusing to know whether to speak up or keep quiet about abuse to protect a friendship. Disclosing abuse is not snitching. Talking about it with safe adults is the right thing to do. And, it protects friends from harm. Friends can also offer to go with their peers to take the situation to a safe adult, or they can talk to the safe adult on their friend’s behalf. Keeping quiet only protects people who cause harm.

Teens, regardless of the situation, can say “no” and have the right to have that “no” honored and respected.

When you are a minor, the ultimate responsibility of protecting children lies with the adult who is supervising—not with you.

However, if possible, there are some things that you can do to help if another minor comes to you with a safety problem.

These are some key facts to remember when thinking about dealing with disclosures:

- **Reassure the child that communicating was the right thing to do.**
- **Don’t promise not to tell.** Children often preface their disclosure with a request for confidentiality. When you let them know that you must tell the people who can help stop the abuse from happening to them or anyone else, they usually still disclose.
- **Be honest with the child.** Let children know what happens next and assure them you will only tell people who need to know to keep the child safe.

If abuse has happened in your life, it is really important to get the information to a safe adult.

In addition, sometimes children or friends might come to you and tell you about something abusive or scary that is happening in their lives. Sometimes they are trusting you with a disclosure of abuse, and the best thing you can do to help them is to get the information to a safe adult.

The following videos will discuss how you can help get the information to a safe adult who can help.

Lesson 2

Many times, people don't disclose about abuse because of fear—that they won't be believed, or that there will be negative consequences—or because they feel like no one else would understand what they're going through.

Our friends are the ones who are most likely to recognize when we are in an unhealthy situation.

Youth who have strong friendships and support systems are better able to navigate and recover from unhealthy or tough situations.

Take action to help...

As a friend, this is why it's important to listen, and be kind, even if you aren't very close.

A common question surrounds whether to promise confidentiality when it comes to hearing about abuse. You, as a friend, *cannot promise* complete confidentiality when hearing about abuse, because there may come a time where you will need to communicate with a safe adult on their behalf—to protect them.

So, what if you've *already* promised to keep it a secret? Can you—or... *should* you—share the information with the right person who can help?

YES!

Does sharing it betray the person and their confidence? **NO.**

Sharing the information with a trusted adult who can help is important. Sharing about abuse is *helping* them—when they can't get the help they need themselves. That's being a good friend, even if it doesn't *feel* like it, because you are watching out for someone else's safety.

Be supportive!

Support can take different forms.

Support doesn't mean you turn a blind eye to unhealthy relationships.

It means being there, believing the person, letting them know you're there for them, even in a crisis, and getting the person the help they need—even if that means communicating a secret to someone who can actually help.

It might mean spending more time with the person, or it could be reporting to law enforcement.

Don't give up on your friends, but don't be a part of their poor decisions either.

Communication is key if you believe a friend is in trouble and needs help.

Action tips to help:

- Ahead of time, write down the reasons that you believe the relationship is problematic to help with the conversation.
- Say why you're concerned.
- Take the time to explain to them that: the behavior is not normal, and life could be better and happier.
- Explain they don't deserve abuse, and,
- Stay calm and logical.

Reach out to others for help if needed, *even if you're not quite sure there's abuse.*

Sometimes we might also need counseling to help us work through trauma.

People you can go to for help include:

- Lesson leader

- School counselor (or a therapist)
- Teacher / Coach
- Youth leader
- Parents
- Any trusted (or safe) adult

If a crime is involved, like physical abuse, sexual exploitation, rape, or child sexual abuse by an adult, you will need to reach out to the police or emergency services.

Offer to go with your friend as a support person.

There are numerous resources for help, including hotlines and websites to visit when in crisis or just for advice.

- The National Domestic Violence Hotline is an organization for people who are in crisis after rape, and need to be connected with a counselor. The website is www.ndvh.org and the phone number is 1-800-799-SAFE
- The National Sexual Assault Hotline is www.rainn.org or 1-800-656-HOPE
- The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org or 1-800-273-8255,
- And, Child Protective Services is available in each state through a quick Internet search.

Do the right thing...

Providing friends with your support and avenues of help could save them from years of pain... And, could ultimately save their lives.

People who perform inappropriate behavior in relationships will continue to do so until they're stopped.

Getting out of the relationship, and reporting any crimes that occurred, like physical abuse or rape, help to stop the victimization of others.

Abuse is never OK, and now you know how to get help for yourself, or a friend.

You deserve to be in a healthy relationship, that contributes to a happy and healthy life.

Lesson 3

Whether as an employee or a volunteer, there are special considerations to be noted when contributing to a safe environment—even when you are a minor yourself.

If you are a minor, your organization may have a policy stating that upon your 18th birthday, or perhaps when you graduate high school, you will need to complete compliance-related screening procedures such as background checks, policy- or code of conduct acknowledgements and additional training.

There may also be organization-specific dating rules regarding age. You'll want to check with your organization for specifics.

In any program or environment involving children, there is an increased level of observation that is needed.

The responsibility to ensure the safety of children is 100% that of adults—it's their job to keep youth safe.

You, as a teen, can assist in this endeavor, too.

Your observations of adults or older youth who behave inappropriately, or who make you feel uncomfortable, are **important indicators of an issue**.

You might even notice that *other* youth feel uncomfortable or uneasy when around these individuals.

Examples of inappropriate behavior on behalf of adults or older teens include:

- People who work to be alone (one-on-one) with youth, or discourage others from participating.
- People who show favoritism or give individual children specialized gifts without permission from the parents or the organization.
- People who ask youth to keep things “secret” or “just between them.”
- People who go overboard touching or tickling, or touch children in places that are sensitive or private; they might invite kids to sit on their laps.
- People who tell crude jokes, use sexually explicit language, talk about private parts, or talk about sexual matters.
- People who show others pornographic images or material, or ask youth to share pornographic images or material; this might not just be a warning sign, it could also be illegal.

Each of these examples (at the very least) are warning signs that the individual is overstepping proper boundaries.

If people are exhibiting these warning signs, or other inappropriate behavior, it does not always mean that they are grooming or abusing a child.

Regardless of who it is, or why they’re doing the behavior, or even the circumstances involved, the information has to get to a safe adult.

A **safe adult** is one who prioritizes safety.

You might also observe children who are exhibiting red flag behaviors that could be a sign that they need help from a safe adult.

Examples include...

- When there is a sudden change in behavior, relating to likes or dislikes, or eating habits...
- They may become aggressive, withdrawn or depressed,
- They lose interest in activities,
- They become secretive, or guarded, particularly with technology or online activities,
- They become fearful, anxious or uncomfortable around certain people,
- They bathe excessively, or stop taking care of personal hygiene, and,
- They exhibit self-injury, drug or alcohol abuse.

If a youth tells you they’ve been abused, believe them. Get the information to a safe adult.

If you’re aware of any of these types of behaviors, whether from an adult or child, it’s important to communicate your concerns to a safe adult.

If you feel uncomfortable with *that* person, you can speak to their supervisor, too.

There are *always* people who can, and want to help, even if it means that you have to call the authorities.

If there is ever a time where you feel that there is an emergency, you can call 911. You can also call the police anytime you feel you need help and aren’t getting it from people in your life who are supposed to be safe.

You might have to be a voice for a youth who cannot speak up on their own.

This is the right thing to do when we know that others are in trouble.

Thank you for doing what is right.

Steps from *A Plan To Protect God's Children*™



1

KNOW THE WARNING SIGNS OF ADULTS


Knowing the behavioral warning signs of adults means we can recognize inappropriate and concerning actions adults exhibit—which may also be part of the grooming process.

Step 1—Warning signs of adults:

- Discourages others from participating/monitoring
- Attempts to be alone with, or isolates, children
- Seems more excited to be with children than adults
- Gives gifts, without permission
- Goes overboard touching, wrestling, tickling...
- Uses bad language, or tells inappropriate or sexual jokes to children
- Behaves or speaks as if the rules do not apply to them (ignores policy, bends rules)
- Allows young people to engage in activities parents would not allow
- Tells children to keep secrets from others
- Takes, posts or shares photos without the parent's or the organization's approval
- Shows young people sexual content or pornography (*which is also abuse*)

Step 2—Screening measures:

- Create procedures to determine who has access to children
- Regularly review and distribute guidelines and policies for adults working with minors
- Use standard employment/volunteer applications
- Identify any history or known conduct that could create future harm
- Obtain previous experience with youth-serving organizations




2

SCREEN AND SELECT EMPLOYEES AND VOLUNTEERS

Adopting proactive screening procedures makes it more difficult for people with bad intentions—or problematic behavior—to have access to youth.

- Complete face-to-face interviews
- Require criminal background checks (initial and refresher)
- Check personal and employment references
- Attend safe environment training
- Ensure compliance with the rules and policies
- Communicate the organization's commitment to keeping children safe
- Apply all of these measures consistently



3

MONITOR ALL ENVIRONMENTS, INCLUDING ACTIVITIES INVOLVING TECHNOLOGY

We closely supervise the entire environment with careful oversight, whether it is on-site or online.

Step 3—Monitoring environments:

Employees & volunteers can monitor in-person environments:

- Maintain a healthy caution about any environment in which children are entrusted
- Identify secluded areas, lock empty rooms
- Develop and follow policies regarding the use of any area (open, secluded, off-site, etc.)
- Don't permit children to enter staff-only areas
- Only meet with children where other adults have open access
- Perform consistent and random status checks
- Ensure enough adults are involved in programs

- Don't start new programs without approval
- Encourage parental involvement to evaluate safety, giving parents proper program access

Employees & volunteers can monitor technology, too:

- Always use sanctioned devices/accounts to communicate with youth
- Never “friend,” “follow,” or communicate with youth using personal accounts
- Always communicate with youth during appropriate timeframes
- Never take or post photos of youth without the proper approvals
- Install and use appropriate blocking/filtering software



4

BE ATTENTIVE TO CHILDREN AND YOUTH

We need to be attentive to concerning behavioral cues that children might exhibit when experiencing abuse.

And, as protectors, we need to teach them how to partner with us for their safety.

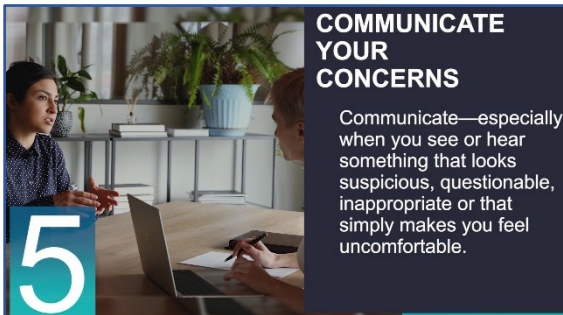
Step 4—Being attentive to youth includes:

Recognizing the concerning behavioral cues children and youth may exhibit when experiencing abuse, such as:

- Sudden behavioral change(s) (likes/dislikes, health, eating habits)
- Appearing increasingly moody or aggressive, withdrawn or depressed
- Losing interest in school, or having a sudden shift in grades/school activities
- Becoming secretive or defensive (including with technology or online activities)
- Becoming fearful, anxious, or uncomfortable around certain people
- Bathing excessively or discontinuing personal hygiene
- Showing regressive behavior, such as bed-wetting, thumb-sucking, etc.

And, we can teach children and youth the following when advocating for their safety and boundaries:

- The *Personal Boundary Safety Rules*: Say “no,” try to get away, and tell a safe adult right away
- What to do when they feel uncomfortable, violated, unsafe, or if someone tries to force them, or their friends, to see, touch, or show their private parts
- Youth have a right to be safe; it’s OK to speak up
- Being abused/victimized is never the youth’s fault
- Youth always have safe adults who will advocate for their safety and protection
- When it comes to their safety, we will believe them and work to protect them



Step 5—Ways to communicate concerns:

- If you see or hear of a potential warning sign of inappropriate behavior, do not hesitate—speak to a supervisor right away
- If you continue to see inappropriate behavior, communicate again, or go to another supervisor
- If abuse has been disclosed to you, or you suspect that a child is being, or has been, abused, contact the child protection agency in your state
- If the suspected abuse involves a church volunteer, employee or member of the clergy, first contact civil authorities, and then also notify a church official
- If you are aware a child is in danger of imminent abuse, call emergency services right away (dial 911 immediately)
- When youth are being sexually exploited online, make a report to www.CyberTipline.org, or you can also contact law enforcement

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To report abuse in Illinois:

If you suspect a child is in imminent danger from abuse, please call **911** immediately.

To report *known* or *suspected* child abuse, contact:

Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS)
1-800-25-ABUSE

<https://dcfsonlinereporting.dcfcs.illinois.gov/>

For more information:

Please contact the Diocese of Joliet’s

Office of Child and Youth Protection
<https://protect.diojoliet.org/homepage>

815-221-6116

or

Victim Assistance Coordinator
<https://protect.diojoliet.org/reporting-abuse-in-the-diocese-of-joliet>

815-263-6467



Protecting God’s Children®

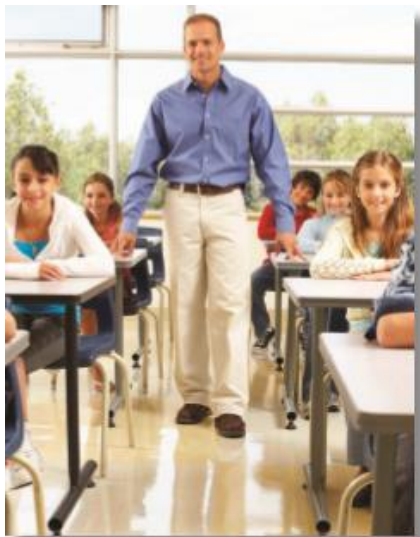
4.0 Program for Adults



VIRTUS Online™
www.virtus.org

Quick Reference Guide

Teaching Boundaries and Safety Reference Guide™



Point 1: Teaching about the Private Body Parts

Children are naturally curious, and they have questions about their bodies. Children who are not provided adequate answers from their parents, guardians, or other safe adults are more vulnerable to abuse. Teaching children about their body parts is important to the developmental process.

Point 2: Who are Safe Friends and Safe Adults

Children, by nature, trust people—even people they don't know. This trust is what attracts people to children—people with both good and bad intentions. How can you, as a parent or caring adult, maintain a child's trusting innocence while also keeping the child safe? For the purposes of teaching safety, safe friends and safe adults are people who:

- Won't hurt the child without a good reason and won't confuse or scare the child intentionally; and

- Are sure to respect the child's wishes and the wishes and the rules of the child's parents, guardians, and caretakers when it comes to personal safety—including touching safety.

Point 3: The Difference Between Safe and Unsafe Touches

Safe Touches

One way a child can tell if someone is safe is by observing how the person touches others. Safe friends and safe adults touch children in safe ways and not in ways that are scary or confusing. Safe friends and safe adults don't touch children in ways that seem strange, or that hurt without a good reason. You should then explain *why* these touches are safe. They are touches that have a good purpose, are not intended to hurt, and are familiar and safe.



Unsafe Touches

An unsafe touch is any touch that is meant to hurt or scare someone. Hitting, punching, tripping, kicking, and spitting are examples of unsafe touches. In addition to these examples, parents, guardians, or other safe adults must also explain that touching private body parts can also be an unsafe touch. Let your child know that any touch that is new, scary, or confusing—or a touch that starts out okay but becomes scary or confusing—may be an unsafe touch. Teach children to trust

their own instincts and to speak up when something makes them uncomfortable.

Point 4: Teaching Children to Identify Their Special Safe Adults

A child's life may include many, many safe friends and safe adults. That's why it is important for a child to know about special safe adults. Most people who are considered safe adults do not have the right to see or touch a child's private body parts for any purpose. Once children understand *safe friends and safe adults* and *safe and unsafe touches*, you must explain the specific meaning of *special safe adults*.

Parents, guardians, or other safe adults must begin by identifying your child's special safe adults. Establish the criteria for determining your child's special safe adults by asking yourself these two questions:

1. "Who, other than myself, would respect my child's physical safety and respect my wishes regarding my child's safety—including the safety of his or her private body parts?"
2. "Of these people, who might ever be put into a position to see or touch my child's private body parts for the purpose of helping keep my child clean or healthy?"

Point 5: Teaching What to Do if Touched in an Unsafe Manner

Teach your child a simple rule for what to do if someone tries to touch him or her in an unsafe way. The child must send a clear signal to any child or adult whose behavior is unsafe—a signal that unsafe behavior will not be tolerated. A child needs to know that any time someone tries to touch his or her private body parts or tries to get the child to touch the private body parts of the other person, the child should say words that mean "No!" and then should tell the child's mother or father or another safe adult as soon as possible.

Instruct young children to run away if the touching involves private body parts or if they don't feel safe for any other reason. Let children know that you will believe them, and that they will not be in any trouble for saying "No!" and running away. Tell older children to immediately get away from the person who touched them inappropriately. This may mean walking away or backing away from the person, or it may mean altogether leaving the location of the unsafe person.

Parents, guardians, and caring adults should remember that most children do not lie about abuse. So, when a child discloses abuse—directly or indirectly (such as telling about a friend who is being hurt by someone)—it is important to provide support for the child. By following some simple rules, you can assure children that they are safe and that telling was the right thing to do:

1. **Let children talk.**
2. **Avoid displays of shock or disgust.**
3. **Respect the child's privacy.**
4. **Address the child's feelings and let him or her know that you trust the child and that the story will be investigated.**
5. **Be honest with the child about what will happen next.**
6. **Do not scold the child.**
7. **Get immediate medical attention if necessary.**
8. **Get counseling/therapy for the child.**
9. **Don't be surprised or upset if the child reports the incident to someone outside of the family.**



Point 6: Teaching “No Secrets”

Communication is necessary to prevent abuse. It is difficult for children to talk about child sexual abuse—even children who understand and practice touching safety. It is not uncommon for children to keep abuse hidden, and child molesters rely on this secrecy.

That's why you should establish this important point:

Your child can tell you about anything that makes him or her feel unsafe—even if someone told him or her to keep it a secret or threatened the child if he or she told.

Assure your child that you will listen to him or her and not get angry, and that your child's safety is your first priority.

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Please keep in mind that this quick reference guide is designed to summarize and highlight many of the key points of the Teaching Boundaries and Safety Guide™. Please consult the full Guide for all relevant information.



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