



The Child Sex Abuse Crisis: Q&A for Parents

Every April Catholic parishes and schools across the U.S. participate in National Child Abuse Prevention Month. While dioceses work year-round to prevent abuse, during the month of April a special emphasis is placed on the importance of learning how to protect the vulnerable from this evil.

Below is a list of questions and answers for parents prepared by the Secretariat for Child and Youth Protection at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Every child deserves a safe environment, and these questions and answers will help parents ensure that a safe environment for children is a reality.

What should I do if I suspect my child has been abused?

Call the police or social services department in your community. Reassure your child that he/she did nothing wrong and that he/she did the right thing by telling you. You may want to find a child counselor experienced in child abuse matters. Call the victim assistance person in your diocese.

My child came home and told me about being shown pornography. What should I do?

Call the police. There is no good reason for an adult to share pornography with children. Assure your child that they are not in trouble, that they did the right thing by telling you. If necessary, help them process the experience by talking about your feelings toward pornography and why it is wrong. If the child was shown pornography at school, let school officials know about it as well. Call the victim assistance person in your diocese.

I get the ‘creeps’ from one of the volunteers at Church. He always has his hands on kids in one way or another. What should I do?

Listen to your ‘gut.’ Offenders give warning signs that knowledgeable adults can use; your ‘gut’ often

picks them up. You are not accusing someone of abuse you are communicating your concern about inappropriate behavior. Let the diocesan/eparchial victim assistance or safe environment coordinator know of your concerns. Let the supervisor of the



program know of them as well. Keep reporting your concerns until someone hears you. Your courage to report those types of incidents may be very helpful. Reporting can let the person know their behavior is unacceptable, and it lets them know they are being watched. If it is poor judgment, this gives the person the opportunity to change the behavior.



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Why do I have to be trained? I did not do anything wrong, this is a clergy problem.

Child sexual abuse is a widespread societal problem, not a Catholic clergy problem. The more people who are trained to recognize the warning signs of an offender, the safer our children are. In the aftermath of the clergy scandal, the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* requires the Church to train both adults and children to prevent child sexual abuse. This is not because the Church thinks all adults are the problem. It is because the solution to preventing child sexual abuse depends on caring adults knowing what to do.

My children are too young to hear this. Aren't you destroying the 'innocent period' of their development?

Teaching children about boundaries and safe touches is not sex education. There are many safety issues we teach children: bike safety, water

safety, fire prevention, driver's training, etc. Personal safety programs should have age appropriate lessons that give children the skills they need to protect themselves without frightening them. Keeping children unaware of the dangers around them does not keep them safe. Predators count on children not knowing what to do.

I believe morality should be taught in the home, not in school. Does my child have to attend these training classes?

You are right, morality is best taught in the home, but this is personal safety training, not morality class and not sex education. Catholic moral theology compels us to keep children safe. Parents are the primary educators of their children, and those who do not want their children to participate in the school/religious education portion of the training may opt out. They should still receive the parent portion of the training for assistance in how to teach their children to be safe.