

To Protect and to Heal Safe Environment for Grades 9 - 12

God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them. Gen. 1:27

Human life is sacred because from its beginning it involves the creative action of God and it remains for ever in a special relationship with the Creator, who is its sole end. CCC 2258

Prayer

Thank you, God, for the gift of ourselves. Remind us, too, that those around us were created by you and are loved by you, just the way we are. Thank you for your gifts to others. Thank you for your gifts to us. Amen.

Introduction

This guide will help you reflect on and understand child abuse, specifically child sexual abuse - what it is, ways to avoid sexual abuse, and things to do if you or someone you know has been sexually abused.

It is estimated that one in four girls and one in seven boys is sexually abused at least once by the time they are eighteen. In some cases, especially those involving incest, the abuse occurs on a regular basis for many years. The average age for sexual abuse is about 10 or 11, but children of all ages, even teenagers, have been molested.

Unfortunately, an alarming number of teens and children are not given a choice about engaging in sexual activity. Sex is forced upon them by someone older and

stronger, often someone they know and love. In these situations sex is a degrading act of violence.

The overwhelming majority of adults working with youth today are positive and faithful individuals, dedicated to helping our youth grow in the Catholic faith. Unfortunately, there have been cases where adults have behaved inappropriately and have even abused people entrusted to their care.

The Church believes in the dignity of the human person and recognizes abusive behavior as sinful and in some cases criminal. One victim of abuse is one too many. The Church seeks to restore any broken relationship . . . sometimes this is difficult.

The Archdiocese of New Orleans is sincerely committed to the spiritual and emotional well being of all by providing morally good, healthy, and informed leaders, thereby making the Church a place of safety and trust. The Archdiocese needs you to share in this responsibility of awareness and to seek help for yourselves or your friends if you are aware of any prior or present sexual abuse.

What constitutes child abuse, including sexual abuse?

Child Physical Abuse: the infliction or attempted infliction of physical injury or, as a result of inadequate supervision, the allowance of physical injury to a minor.

Child Sexual Abuse: includes sexual molestation or sexual exploitation of a minor and other behavior by which an adult uses a minor as an object of sexual gratification.

Child Neglect: The refusal or willful failure by a caretaker to provide for a minor the proper or necessary medical care, nutrition, or other care necessary for a minor's well-being.

What types of behavior or touch are acceptable, inappropriate, never acceptable, and illegal?

Your body is your sacred domain. You have a right to decide how it will be touched and by whom. No one is ever free to force, pressure, or tease you into having sexual contact of any kind.

Appropriate forms of affection include:

- Side hugs
- Shoulder to shoulder or “temple” hugs
- Pats on the shoulder or back
- Handshakes
- “High-fives” and hand slapping
- Verbal praise
- Kneeling or bending down for hugs with small children
- Arms around shoulders
- Holding hands while walking with small children
- Holding hands during prayer

There are some forms of touch or physical affection that have been used by adults to initiate inappropriate contact with young people. If you feel uncomfortable with any of these actions, it is appropriate for you to stop the action and to tell a trusted adult. If you are unable to stop the action, it is appropriate for you to tell a trusted adult after the incident occurs. Here are some examples of possible inappropriate behavior:

- Compliments that relate to physique or body development
- Any type of massage given by an adult to a minor or a minor to an adult
- Touching buttocks, chest, or genital areas
- Touching knees or legs of a minor or young person

There are some forms of touch or physical affection that are never acceptable. In order to maintain the safest possible environment for young people, the following are examples of touch inappropriate for use in Church - or school - sponsored and affiliated programs. If a young person is unable to stop the action, it would still be appropriate for the young person to tell a trusted adult after the incident occurs. Here are some examples of never acceptable behavior or touch:

- Inappropriate or lengthy embraces
- Kisses on the mouth
- Showing affection in isolated areas of the program such as bedrooms, closets, “staff only” areas, or other private rooms
- Sleeping in bed with a minor
- Any form of unwanted affection

The final type is abusive behavior. Those are defined on the first page of this guide.

What can I do to protect myself?

- If you are uncomfortable with the way someone is treating you, trust your feelings
- Know who you are and know what is important to you. Know what you want for your future. Don't let present activities get in the way of your future
- Get to know a person before you go alone on a date with him/her
- Never take a drink from someone you don't know. Pour your own drinks at a party and don't set them down where you cannot see them
- Do not drink alcohol or take any substance that will lower your ability to make clear decisions
- Leave a party or activity and call a trusted adult to help you if you feel uncomfortable or unsafe

How does a teenager identify instances of abuse of a young person, including sexual abuse?

Sexual abuse may be indicated by certain physical and behavioral signs as well as by indirect comments made by the young person. There are several clues to look for when one suspects the possibility of child sexual abuse. Physical signs include irritation, pain or injury to the genital area, and genital or urinary infection. A young person may withdraw or show a sudden, unexplained change in behavior. Other signs may be nervous, aggressive, hostile, or disruptive behavior toward adults, especially parents. A young person may manifest eating or sleep disturbances, including nightmares or insomnia. One should also be alert to knowledge or actions of a sexual nature that are not age-appropriate. One sign alone may not be a positive indication,

since any of these signs can point to other conditions as well. However, if a number of signs are present, the possibility of sexual abuse should be considered and appropriate action taken, including seeking medical evaluation. (*Walk in the Light: A Pastoral Response to Child Sexual Abuse*, USCCB)

What are the lifetime effects of physical and/or sexual child abuse?

Approximately 40% of all victims and survivors suffer after-effects serious enough to require physical and/or psychological assistance. After-effects can include:

- Difficulties with trust
- Difficulties with self-protection
- Difficulties with self-esteem
- Difficulties with fitting in
- Difficulties with love/relationships
- Difficulties with sexual behavior
- Physical difficulties like urinary tract infections, sexually transmitted disease, speech impediments, nightmares, headaches, stomach aches
- Spiritual difficulties like angry feelings toward God and inability to pray

What should you do if you or someone you know has been physically or sexually abused?

If you have been abused and have never talked about it, tell someone you trust, preferably a parent, teacher, counselor, or youth minister. You may need professional help to cope with the abuse, to put it in perspective, and to move on to a healthier way of relating to the world. If a friend tells you that they have been physically or sexually abused by an adult

and asks you to promise not to tell, don't be sworn to secrecy. Say, "I can't promise to keep a secret if your life is in danger or you are being hurt." Then, seek the help of a trusted adult or professional who can help you report the situation.

Archdiocese of New Orleans
Victims' Assistance Coordinator

Sr. Carmelita Centanni, M.S.C., Ph.D
7887 Walmsley Avenue
New Orleans, Louisiana 70125-3496
(504) 861 – 6253
Sex Abuse Hot Line (504 – 522 – 5019)

To report any child abuse, call one of telephone numbers listed below:



CHILD PROTECTION TELEPHONE NUMBERS

| | |
|------------------|------------------|
| Jefferson (East) | 504 - 736 - 7033 |
| Jefferson (West) | 504 - 361 - 6083 |
| Orleans | 504 - 680 - 9000 |
| | 504 - 680 - 9001 |
| Plaquemines | 504 - 393 - 5618 |
| St. Bernard | 504 - 278 - 7382 |
| St. Charles | 985 - 652 - 2938 |
| St. John | 985 - 652 - 2938 |
| St. Tammany | 985 - 893 - 6225 |
| Washington | 985 - 732 - 6800 |

To report clergy abuse of a young person, call: