

What Every Parent/Guardian Should Know

As adults one of our primary concerns is the health and well-being of our children and teenagers. We are entrusted with the care of children and one of the practical realities in today's world is that we must take a proactive stance to understand some of the dangers children face today. Sadly, sexual abuse is more prevalent than most of us realize. It happens in families, in communities and at activities where we have always thought our children were safe. Every year, many thousands of children are victims of sexual abuse. This material has been developed to provide parents and other adults with some information about the sexual abuse of children.



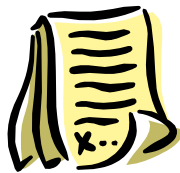
What Is Sexual Abuse?

Sexual abuse involves forcing, tricking, threatening, or pressuring a child into sexual awareness or activity. Sexual abuse occurs when an older or more knowledgeable child or adult uses a child for sexual pleasure or gratification. Sexual abuse may include both touching and non-touching behaviors. Some examples are:

- Touching genitals,
- Playing sexual games,
- Showing pornography,
- Exposing genitals,
- Watching children undress or use the bathroom,
- Sexual intercourse or play.

Some Facts About Sexual Abuse.

In most cases, the child/adolescent who is abused knows the abuser. Often the abuser is a member of the immediate or extended family or a close or trusted friend or even an acquaintance. Abuse by a stranger is more rare. Most instances of sexual abuse happen in the home.



Who Sexually Abuses Children?

People who sexually abuse children/adolescents come from all walks of life. Family members, teachers, coaches, babysitters, trusted friends may be sexual abusers. What sexual abusers have in common is that they have acted on their desire for sexual activity with children and sexually abused a child.

What Can We Do To Keep Our Children Safe?

- Develop a healthy atmosphere at home
- Know how to talk to your children about sexual abuse
- Practice some scenarios so children develop a sense of what to do in dangerous situations
- Be aware of the warning signs of sexual abuse in children/adolescents
- Be aware of the behavioral characteristics of sexual abusers
- Be alert to the ways you can help ensure the safety of your child/teen at his/her activities.

Developing A Healthy Atmosphere At Home

Develop an atmosphere of trust and acceptance so your children will feel free to talk to you.

Remind your children that they are precious in the eyes of God
Talk to your children and get to know what they think and how they feel.

Listen to them with attention and respect.

Encourage your children to talk to you about anything.

Teach your children a basic vocabulary for parts of the body and bodily functions.

Set and respect family boundaries. Allow privacy for dressing, bathing, sleeping and other personal activities.

Teach your children basic safety rules and insist on the buddy system.

Respect children's NO regarding kissing or hugging other adults.

Talk to your child about "what to do if..." scenarios.

Teach your child to trust his/her own feelings.

Urge your child to tell you about anything or anybody who makes them uncomfortable.

Believe them. Children rarely lie about sexual abuse.

Teach your children the difference between secrets and surprises. Secrets hurt others if they learn them; surprises are fun for everybody!



Basic Rules of Safety for Children

1. Never go out without telling an adult where you are going.
2. Use the buddy system.
3. Pay attention to behavior that doesn't seem right to you.
 - anyone sitting or standing too close to you
 - anyone who invites you to a private place
 - anyone who touches you in a way that makes you feel sad, angry, confused or uncomfortable
 - anyone who doesn't pay attention when you say NO
 - anyone who shows you books, videos or pictures that your parents wouldn't show you.
4. Say **NO** or **I DON'T WANT TO DO THAT** loudly.
5. Yell or scream to bring help.
6. Get away as fast as you can.
7. Tell your parents or another trusted adult about what happened right away.

Parents' Prayer

*Lord God, Giver of Life and Source of all Hope
You have entrusted us with the precious gift of life
in children.*

*We praise you and we thank you for the many gifts of love our
children offer us each day.*

*Help us to guide them in Your ways
Inspire us to teach them well in attitudes of
peace, justice and love.*

*Lead us to grow in patience, openness to the Holy Spirit
and courage to face the challenges of parenthood.*

*As we send our children into the world each day,
We ask your protection for them.
Watch over them and guide them
Comfort them and give them courage.*

*Bless them with good health and strong faith
that they may praise you all the days of their lives.*

*We ask all these things through Jesus your Son,
our Lord.*

Amen

Safety at Community Activities



- Participate actively in your child's life. Know where he/she is, what adults will be present, what kind of activity your child will participate in and who else will be present. Be aware of the schedule of events.
- Check to see if adults who work with children are subject to a background check and reference checks.
- Be alert for behaviors of adults that may signal inappropriate sexual behavior or boundary issues.
- Locker rooms and other rooms where meetings take place should always be open to parents/guardians.
- Volunteer regularly to be one of the adults present.
- Stay informed about the nature of the activities in which your child/teen is involved.
- Drop in on events and activities in which your child is involved.
- Expect adult leaders to dress, speak and behave as you believe such leaders should.
- If you are uncomfortable with a particular behavior, activity or policy, question it. Talk to the person in charge and explain your concerns. If you're not satisfied with the explanation, keep asking questions.

The Office of Child Protection, Archdiocese of Portland, Oregon gratefully acknowledges the Diocese of Rochester for permission to reprint this brochure.

KEEPING OUR CHILDREN SAFE

Some Advice For Parents/Guardians On The Prevention Of Sexual Abuse Of Children

