



Diocese of Crookston
Safe Environment
Guide for New Employees
And Volunteers

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St. Philip's Parish in Bemidji, MN.
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INTRODUCTION

Volunteers are essential to the working of the Diocese of Crookston, our schools and religious formation. As part of our church family, we strive to create and maintain safe environments for all who are here. Our purpose here is to provide all new volunteers and employees with information pertinent to that endeavor. It is of utmost importance that all who minister in our Diocese learn how to recognize the signs of abuse and indications of grooming behavior. We are all required to know how and where to report our concerns.

The information comes from a variety of sources, including Safe Environment Training Components A, B, and C, the National Catholic Educational Association's publication Religious Education, Parish and Youth Ministry by Mary Angela Shaughnessy, and from Safe Environment training materials used in the Diocese.

Please take time to read over this information. It will assist you in your role as church leader/volunteer.

Thank you for taking an active role in keeping our children, youth, and vulnerable safe.

What is Child Abuse?

Child abuse consists of any act, or failure to act, that endangers a child's physical or emotional health and development. Someone is abusive if he or she physically injures a child, relates sexually to a child or fails to nurture the child.

The four major types of child abuse are: physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect.

According to Minnesota State Law, child abuse, an act that involves a minor victim, is a violation of law. A minor, according to the legal definition, is an individual under 18 years of age.

What is Physical Abuse?

Physical abuse is the injury of a child as a result of aggression. Even if the injury was not intended, the act is considered physical abuse. Some examples are: beating, slapping, hitting, pushing, shaking, kicking, throwing, pinching, biting, choking, hair-pulling, burning with cigarettes or other hot objects, or severe physical punishment.

Physical Punishment vs. Physical Abuse: Physical abuse is an injury resulting from physical aggression. Physical punishment is the use of physical force with the intent of inflicting bodily pain, but not injury, for the purpose of correction or control. It is very possible, and in some cases very easy, for physical punishment to get out of control and become physical abuse. **Physical punishment should never be used in the parishes or schools of the Diocese of Crookston.**

Signs of physical abuse in children: To recognize physical abuse, look for **clusters** of the following physical and behavioral symptoms: burns, bite marks, cuts, bruises, or welts in the shape of an object, resistance to going home, or fear of adults.

What is Emotional Abuse?

Emotional abuse is any attitude, behavior, or failure to act that interferes with a child's mental health or social development. Types of emotional abuse vary from verbal insults to extreme forms of punishment. Emotional abuse may also be described as: verbal abuse, mental abuse, and psychological abuse.

Examples of Emotional Abuse: yelling, screaming, threatening, frightening, or bullying a child; humiliating the child, name-calling, telling a child he or she is "no good", etc.; showing little or no physical affection; confinement to a dark room or closet, or otherwise terrorizing a child; or causing a child to witness violent behavior, including the physical abuse of others.

Signs of Emotional Child Abuse: A child may be experiencing emotional abuse if he or she frequently exhibits a combination of the following symptoms: apathy, depression, hostility, difficulty in concentration.

Emotional abuse is almost always present when another form of abuse is found, and its effects are often more long-lasting than any of the other forms of child abuse.

What is Sexual Abuse?

Sexual abuse occurs when an adult involves a child in some form of sexual activity. This activity may include: an adult fondling a child's genitals or forcing a child to fondle the adult; penetration, including sodomy; forcing a child to undress or spying on a child in a bathroom or bedroom; performing sexual acts in front of a child, or exposing oneself to a child; telling "dirty" stories or showing pornography to a child; oral sex; exploiting a child through child prostitution or child pornography.

Signs of child sexual abuse: inappropriate interest in and knowledge of sexual acts; over compliance or excessive aggression; fear of a particular person or family member, or of a particular place; having symptoms indicating evidence of physical traumas to the genital or anal area; experiencing a loss of appetite or other eating problems, including unexplained gagging; regressing to behaviors too young for the stage of development already achieved.

Remember, no single sign should be taken as proof of abuse. You should look for clusters of physical and behavioral symptoms before you begin to suspect abuse!

Child Sexual Abuse Online

In addition to the traditional forms of child sexual abuse, predators have also begun using the internet to target and perpetrate abuse against children.

Warning Signs of Online Sexual Abuse: The U.S. Department of Justice has identified the following as signs of Online Child Sexual Abuse: your child spends large amounts of time online, especially at night; you find pornography on your child's computer; your child receives phone calls from people you don't know, or is making calls, sometimes long distance, to numbers you don't recognize; your child receives mail, gifts, or packages from someone you don't know; your child turns the computer monitor off or quickly changes the screen on the monitor when you come into the room; your child becomes withdrawn from the family; your child is using an online account belonging to someone else.

Neglect

Unlike other forms of child abuse, **neglect is a crime of omission, the failure to do something**. An adult who is guilty of neglect will have a pattern of failing to provide for a child's basic needs. A single instance of neglect may not be considered child abuse, but repeated neglect certainly is abuse.

Examples of Neglect: **Physical** – failure to provide food, clothing appropriate for the weather, a home that is hygienic and safe, medical care and/or adequate supervision; **Educational** – failure to enroll a child in school, or allowing excessive absences from school; **Emotional** – failure to provide emotional support, love, and affection. This can also include a failure to provide psychological care if needed.

Signs of Child Neglect: clothing unsuited to the weather; a child who is frequently dirty or unbathed; extreme hunger; apparent lack of supervision.

Neglect is a very common type of child abuse. In fact, the Child Welfare Information Gateway indicates that more children suffer from neglect than from sexual and physical abuse combined. At the same time, many victims of neglect are never identified.

Causes of Child Abuse

No one has been able to predict which factors will cause a person to abuse a child. However, a significant number of people who abuse children were abused themselves as a child. Also, not all forms of abuse result from a deliberate intention to harm the child. In some cases ignorance and isolation are a factor, and at times abuse can also result from cultural traditions that emphasize the child as being the “property” of the parent. **Whatever the cause, child abuse must stop.**

Other Factors that Might Cause a Person to Abuse a Child: Stress – including the stress of caring for children, especially those with disabilities, special needs or difficult behaviors; lack of nurturing qualities necessary for caring for a child; difficulty controlling anger; personal history of being abused; isolation from the family or community; physical or mental health problems, including depression and anxiety; alcohol or drug abuse; personal problems such as marital/relationship difficulties, unemployment or financial difficulties.

Grooming: Individuals who sexually abuse children and young people often use a technique called “grooming” to gain the trust of the child. ‘Grooming’ in this sense is nurturing a friendship with a child through bonding, such as giving the child gifts, taking him or her on special outings, and showing him or her special attention. ‘Grooming’ is an important technique to be aware of because once a child trusts an adult, the adult can influence the child's attitude toward sexual behavior.

What you need to know about a child who needs to tell. . .

When seeking to disclose abuse, in other words, to ‘tell a trusted adult,’ a child or young person may be hindered by a variety of factors that result in a tentative form of telling.

Tentative telling: The child or young person may: lack the appropriate vocabulary to make the disclosure; feel ashamed or embarrassed; have been told not to tell; have been threatened by the perpetrator with bad consequences for themselves or family members if they told; be testing the adult to see if they will be believed.

Consequently, a child or young person attempting to disclose abuse might attempt to do so through indirect hints: ‘my brother wouldn’t let me sleep last night...’; ‘my babysitter keeps bothering me...’; ‘Mr. Smith has funny underwear...’; ‘my mom says that spanking will toughen me up...’ or through disguised disclosure: ‘I have a friend who was touched in a bad way...’; ‘What would happen if a girl told her mother that she was molested and her mother didn’t believe her?’; ‘Have you ever heard of a kid being left outside in the cold when it was dark outside?’

If you believe that a child or young person is attempting to disclose abuse to you: There are several things that are important to do, and several things that are important NOT to do.

What can I do?

It is important that you communicate the following things to the child or young person:

It is not your fault

I believe you

I am glad you told me

I will try and help you

Abuse is wrong and we take reports very seriously

What should I NOT do?

It is important that you **DO NOT**

Ask the child if he or she is telling the truth

Promise the child that you will not tell anyone else

Criticize the abuser, as it may be someone the child cares about

Express shock or panic

How to report abuse that has been disclosed to you or that you suspect..

While serving in the ministry of the Church (as a member of the clergy, an employee, or a volunteer) you may have the experience of being told of abuse that has occurred or have suspicions of the abuse of a child or vulnerable person. You have the responsibility to take appropriate steps.

What you should do:

If you suspect an act of abuse has occurred, if you actually witness abuse, or if someone tells you that they were hurt, write down the information, carefully noting:

- Any outward physical signs that you see
- Any changes in behavior
- Things that the child or vulnerable person has said
- Any additional information about what happened

If you have any concerns, do not hesitate to call the Office of Safe Environment, Diocese of Crookston at 218-281-4533 . **If you have witnessed abuse or have been directly told of abuse, call civil authorities.**

Reporting:

When considering whether you should report abuse that is known to you or which you suspect, please remember that you do not need proof; suspected child abuse is sufficient reason to make a report to the proper authorities. By doing so, **you may save the life of a child!**

However, it is also important to realize that no one sign or indicator discussed in these training materials should be seen as evidence of abuse. You should look for a cluster of signs, or a pattern of symptoms and behaviors.

Don't Be Afraid to Report

You may be afraid to report suspected child abuse because you fear repercussions for the child or yourself. But, please note:

- The possible child abuse will be investigated before any action is taken, including removing the child from the home.
- Even if you are a mandated reporter, reporting can be anonymous. Your identity is protected unless you consent to the disclosure.
- You are immune from liability for any report made in good faith.

Reporting Abuse to Civil Authorities

State Law: From Current Minnesota Statutes (2005 editions): Chapter 626.556

Subd.3. Persons mandated to report. (a) A person who knows or has reason to believe a child is being neglected or physically or sexually abused, as defined in subdivision 2[1], or has been neglected or physically or sexually abused within the preceding three years, shall immediately (as soon as possible and within 24 hours) report the information to the local welfare agency, agency responsible for assessing for investigating the report, police department, or the county sheriff if the person is:

(1) a professional or professional's delegate who is engaged in the practice of the healing arts, social services, hospital administration, psychological or psychiatric treatment, child care, education, correctional supervision, probation and correctional services, or law enforcement; or (2) employed as a member of the clergy and received the information while engaged in ministerial duties, provided that a member of the clergy is not required by this subdivision to report information that is otherwise privileged under section 595.02, subdivision 1, paragraph (c)[1].

Section 595.02, subdivision 1, exempts clergy from reporting information received during confession.

(b) Any person may voluntarily report to the local welfare agency, agency responsible for assessing or investigating the report, the police department, or the county sheriff if the person knows, has reason to believe, or suspects a child is being or has been neglected or subjected to physical or sexual abuse.

Subd.7. Report. An oral report shall be made immediately by telephone or otherwise. An oral report made by a person required under subdivision 3 to report shall be followed within 72 hours, exclusive of weekends and holidays, by a report in writing to the appropriate police department, the county sheriff, the agency responsible for assessing or investigating the report, or the local welfare agency, unless the appropriate agency has informed the reporter that the oral information does not constitute a report under subdivision 10. Any report shall be of sufficient content to identify the child, any person believe to be responsible for the abuse or neglect of the child if the person is known, the nature and extent of the abuse or neglect and the name and address of the reporter.

The Safe Environment Policy of the Diocese of Crookston

The policies and procedures for the protection of children and young people in the Diocese of Crookston reminds clergy and employees of our Catholic parishes and schools that we are mandated reporters. When working with our children in our parishes and classrooms, we also ask our volunteers, not mandated by law, to make the same commitment to keep these sacred young people safe.

5.1.1 Persons who are obliged by the law of the State of Minnesota and the Diocese of Crookston to report suspected sexual abuse of minors to civil authorities must carry out this duty. Reporting to Church authorities does not excuse any person from this obligation, except as may be allowed by civil law.

How to Report Suspected Abuse

Contact the Local Child Protection Agency
or law enforcement at 911.

A listing of county social services agencies can be found on the webpage of the Minnesota Department of Human Services (www.dhs.state.mn.us)

You can also report suspected child abuse by calling the National Child Abuse Hotline:
1-800-4-A-CHILD

If you know or suspect that child sexual abuse is taking place online, you can also call the
Cyber Tip Line: 1-800-843-5678

In reports regarding abuse by representatives of the Church, in addition to reporting to civil authorities, follow the directives of the Safe Environment Policy of the Diocese of Crookston:

6.1.1 When clergy, diocesan, parish or school personnel and volunteers file a report with civil authorities concerning sexual abuse of a minor by a cleric or one of the diocesan or parish personnel or a volunteer, the Moderator of the Curia is to be notified within twenty-four (24) hours and, if possible, supplied with a copy of the written report.

Moderator of the Curia: Msgr. David Baumgartner, JCL. Contact the Diocese of Crookston at 218-281-4533

More detailed information about reporting suspected or actual abuse can be found in Article Five of the policies and procedures of the Diocese of Crookston, available at your parish or on the diocesan website (www.crookston.org).

Avoiding the Appearance of Impropriety: Recommendations for Keeping Boundaries

Today everyone seems to be talking about boundaries and the avoidance of litigation prompted by the appearance of impropriety. In response to many requests, here is a “don’ts” list for religious educators and ministers.

- 1. Do not stay alone in a room with a student unless there is a window permitting others to view the room or the door is open.** Think before you act. Ask yourself how someone else might perceive what you are doing. If a student were to leave your classroom or other area and claim abuse, a closed area with no visual access would leave little room for a defense.
- 2. Do not allow students to become overly friendly or familiar with you. Students should not call religious educators or ministers by their first names or nick names.** There is a difference between being “friendly” and being “friends” with students. Boundaries between adults and young persons must be enforced. Insisting on proper titles is one way to keep boundaries.
- 3. Do not engage in private correspondence with students. If you receive personal communication from a student and the communication is not appropriate, keep a copy of the communication and do not respond unless you have received permission from a supervisor.** It is not uncommon for students to develop “crushes” on religious educators and ministers, to fantasize about them, and/or to try to communicate on a peer level. If one receives student letters, etc. that are romantic, sexual, or otherwise inappropriate, it is best not to respond and to report the occurrence to one’s supervisor for everyone’s protection.
- 4. Do not visit students in their homes unless their parents are present.** Being alone with young persons can give an appearance of impropriety. Many instances of sexual abuse are alleged to have occurred when adults were present in a student’s home when the parents were absent. In particular, if there is no one home but the student, the situation can quickly become one of your word against the student’s.
- 5. Do not invite students to your home.** The comments in number four also apply here.
- 6. Do not transport students in your vehicle.** Obviously, there exists the same problematic situation of an adult being alone with a student or students. Additionally, the adult may assume personal liability for any accident or injury. It can be very tempting to respond to a student’s request for a ride home, but a better approach would be to wait in an open area with the student until transportation arrives or to direct the student to a parish leader.

7. **Do not take the role of surrogate parent with a student.** Religious educators and ministers are not parents and do not have the responsibilities or privileges of parents. While being supportive and helpful, Church leaders must respect the rights of parents. Some parents, feeling they have been displaced in their children's affections by teachers, are seeking restraining orders against the educators.
8. **Do not criticize a student's parents to the student.** No matter how poorly parents act, they are most likely the only parents their children will have. If you believe a child is abused or neglected, contact the appropriate authorities.
9. **Do not give students your home phone number without the permission and knowledge of your supervisor.** Communication with students via telephone on a regular basis and/or encouraging students to call you at home can give an appearance, even if not the reality, of impropriety. It is best to call students from the school or parish phones if possible.
10. **Do not communicate with students from your home e-mail address.** In brief, communicating with students from home e-mail addresses can give an appearance of secrecy. Religious educators and ministers should always use their parish e-mail accounts.
11. **Do not hire students to work in your home without the express knowledge and consent of your supervisor.** Mixing roles is generally not a good idea. Acting as a young person's employer while serving as a catechist or campus/youth minister can "muddy" the waters where boundaries are concerned. For example, a male teacher taking a babysitter home at midnight is placing himself in a particularly vulnerable position should the student make a claim of inappropriate conduct. Additionally, adults can incur liability for injuries students sustain while in their employ.

Ask yourself:

How would I feel if what I am doing was to appear on the front page of the paper tomorrow?

Many problems could be avoided if adults would ask themselves this question before certain interactions with young people. An even better question might be, "Would Jesus do this?" Fidelity to prayer and the exercise of common sense can help educators avoid boundary "pitfalls" and can protect everyone.

Additional Guidelines

1. Minors should always be viewed, whether in a social or ministerial situation, as the “restricted individuals” they are, that is, they are not independent. Wherever they go and whatever they do should be with the explicit knowledge of the parents or guardian. Also, they are subject to specific civil laws, which may prohibit certain activities. They are not adults and are not permitted unfettered decisions. Any and all involvement should be approached from this premise.
2. Caution and professional attitudes are to be observed in all interactions with minors.
3. Another person should be present in situations involving a minor whenever possible.
4. Games or sport activities should be engaged in only with the presence of other persons or in a place openly accessible and visible to others.
5. Faculty and staff should avoid being present as the only other person in a locker room or other dressing area when a minor is using the facilities.
6. Student trips should have a sufficient number of adult chaperones to preclude the appearance of inappropriate personal involvement with students.
7. While on trips, adults should maintain a professional demeanor and socialize with the utmost discretion and the highest professional standards and in the presence of other reputable adult chaperones.
8. There should never be any trip with a minor alone, most especially any overnight trip.
9. Staff members and chaperones should never stay overnight in the same room with a minor, even if there are two beds, Exception: a parent and his/her child could share the same room.
10. Attraction to or from minors should be recognized and care taken in all interactions. A supervisor should be notified of any such attraction immediately.
11. It is absolutely forbidden for any member of the staff to date a student or participant.
12. Adults should always be aware of the “power” of their role and position, which can be a very seductive force.
13. Discussions of a sexual nature are to take place only in an educational context as part of a specific curriculum or in an official counseling context. Sexual terms and innuendo must be avoided when interacting with young people.

14. Topics or vocabulary, which could not comfortably be used in the presence of parents or administrators, should not be employed with students.
15. Adults may never supply or serve alcohol or any controlled substance to minors.
16. Alcohol should never be consumed in the presence of minors nor should it be used if activities with minors are scheduled.
17. Finally, all adults should regard themselves as representatives of Christ when dealing with the students who are part of their charge and should treat each student with respect and care.

E-Mail

E-mail and instant messaging are examples of the blessings and the curse that technology brings to parishes and schools. Everyone must understand that there is no privacy on the Internet. The same boundary issues that must be respected in oral communications must be respected in written ones, particularly when e-mail is involved. Many people may view what is written, so the test of publicity must always be kept in mind: how would I feel if this correspondence suddenly ended up on the front page of the newspaper or on the evening news? The following ten guidelines can guide administrators and staff in the appropriate use of e-mail.

1. Use your school or parish e-mail account. Never use your home or personal e-mail account. Using a personal account can give an appearance of secrecy. If you do not have access to a school or parish account, set up a separate account on your home computer and use it only for matters related to your ministry.
2. Always remember you are a professional or adult volunteer rendering a service. You are not the young person's friend or buddy.
3. Communicate only about matters that are appropriate to be discussed in the parish or school. Most especially avoid any communication that might be construed as having sexual overtones. Do not reply to any such e-mail you receive; make and keep a copy of any such inappropriate communication and notify your supervisor.
4. Write as though you are certain that others will read what you write. Remember that a young person can share your message with others by a simple push of a button.
5. Remember there is no such thing as a private e-mail.

6. Do not use instant messaging. While it may have become customary for those who work in youth ministry to use instant messaging to communicate details regarding a program or gathering due to the fast pace, high mobility and independence of young people, ministers would be advised to proceed with caution. If used in the course of ministry, instant messages should originate from a parish account, not the minister's home account. It would be better not to put young people to whom you minister on your "buddy list." If you find that someone has added you to his or her list, ask that your name be removed and keep a written record of your request. Remember – people can make copies of instant messages and they can come back to haunt you.
7. Ask yourself, if anyone asked to see this communication, would I be embarrassed by what I have written? If the answer is "yes," don't send the e-mail.
8. Remember, the young person you are e-mailing is someone's child. How would you feel if your son or daughter received the e-mail you are about to send? If you think your e-mail might somehow be misunderstood, don't send it.
9. Remember, boundaries must be respected in written correspondence as well as in oral communication. Don't push the boundaries of ministerial relationships.
10. Finally, e-mail can be misinterpreted. Before sending an e-mail, ask yourself if someone reading it might "read something into it" that you didn't intend or if your message might be misinterpreted. Communicate in person whenever possible.