

Newsletter

SEXUAL ABUSE PREVENTION AND RESPONSE SERVICES
SAFEGUARDING ALL OF GOD'S FAMILY



THIS ISSUE

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In 2002 the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops adopted the Charter for the *Protection of Children and Young People* that requires all dioceses to establish “safe environment” programs. The Office for Sexual Abuse Prevention and Response Services, along with your support, is committed to the development of such programs. This gives the opportunity for members of Archdiocese of Milwaukee parish and school communities to come together for the benefit of all of God’s family.

As a society, we face the challenge of developing enhanced interventions and community action strategies that will provide safety and security for all family members and prevent the problems of child abuse from reoccurring.

Our efforts include the VIRTUS “Protecting God’s Children for Adults” program (www.virtus.org), developing continued educational and awareness programs for children and adults, updating and maintaining policies and procedures for a continued safe environment in our parishes and schools, as well as serving as a resource to parish and school staff members who have questions and concerns regarding of the Safeguarding All of God’s Family program.

It is our intention to share strategies and information in a way that is positive and not fear-based. In this newsletter, we will provide information from professionals, community members, and occasional stories from survivors of child sexual abuse.

Peace,

Amy Peterson

Victim Assistance Coordinator

Patti Loehrer

Safe Environment Coordinator

“LET’S PUT OUR MINDS TOGETHER, AND SEE WHAT
LIFE WE WILL MAKE FOR OUR CHILDREN”

-Tatanka Latanka (Sitting Bull)
Akwesansne Nation

Adult Responsibilities

As the Victim Assistance Coordinator, I listen to the stories of adults who were sexually abused as children by clergy. Many were also harmed by other adults whom they trusted. There is a lot to glean from their stories. There are many opportunities to learn ways to better protect our children from ever experiencing the horror of child sexual abuse.

In recent years, the light has been shining on the Catholic Church and the impact of child sexual abuse by clergy has had ripple effects on the entire Church community. As a society, if we look deeper, we see that child sexual abuse is a hidden, but significant, problem in every community. Experts estimate that one in four girls and one in six boys will be sexually abused before their 18th birthday. In response to this epidemic, the Catholic Church is committed to educating adults and children on how to prevent child sexual abuse.

It is important to give children the knowledge and language they need to grow up making healthy choices and to create an environment where children feel safe to come forward if they are victimized by another. However, it is unrealistic to expect a five-year-old to fend off sexual advances from an adult relative. A five-year-old can't recognize sexual advances for what they are. And a five-year-old has been taught to "mind" adults who are authority figures. It is unrealistic to think that a five-year-old can or even should protect him/herself in this situation. It is our charge to work together as adults to protect children.

Amy Peterson

Basic Tips for Parents

(Excerpt for Darkness2Light)

- *Try to create a climate where your child feels comfortable talking to you. Tell the child that it is okay to talk to you about anything and that you always want to know if someone upsets him or her, even if it is someone you care about. A child needs to know that if she or he tells you something difficult, they will be believed.*
- *Teach your child his or her full name, your full name, telephone number and the address where you live, including the name of the town and state. For smaller children, putting this information to a familiar song can help them remember it. Make sure your child knows how to make an emergency phone call and a collect phone call.*
- *Establish routines with your children that keep you informed about where they are and when they will be home. For instance, if your child has to stay after school or wants to go somewhere after school, make sure they always call you first.*
- *Create a support system for your child. Help your child make a list of all the people in his or her life to whom they can turn for help.*
- *Try to teach your child how to resolve conflicts without violence. You can be a role model by using non-violent discipline techniques, such as time-outs, removal of privileges, and restrictions. Role play situations with your child, so that your child can practice responding to potentially dangerous situations ("What if. . ." games).*

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE—MYTH OR FACT?

- Child sexual abuse is a rare occurrence.
- Children are usually molested by strangers.
- The child will always feel negatively toward the offender.
- Sexual abuse is non-violent, and non-damaging.
- Children lie about child sexual abuse.
- Children are seductive.
- Child sexual abuse is a one or two time occurrence, involving a single child.
- It is better not to talk about child sexual abuse-the child will forget.

(Answers can be found on the following page.)

None of the statements on the previous page are fact. Each one is a myth.

Myth: Child sexual abuse is a rare occurrence.

Fact: Child sexual abuse is, unfortunately, not a rare occurrence. It is estimated that approximately 1 of every 4 females and 1 of every 6 males experience some form of sexual exploitation as children.

Myth: Children are usually molested by strangers.

Fact: 85% of children are molested by someone they know, i.e. family members, relatives, neighbors and/or family friends. Offenders look for opportunity and access to children.

Myth: The child will always feel negatively toward the offender.

Fact: The role the offender plays in the child's life may be vital, that is, they may be a close family member or someone in a position of trust. The abuse occurring will be very confusing to the child because of secrecy, shame, lies and isolation that follows. The child wants the abusive behavior to stop; they do not want to lose the hope for protection and caring that is their right. It is important to be aware of the many different feelings that the victim may be experiencing and to recognize the loss the child faced because of the offender's exploitation of trust.

The secrecy, shame, lies, isolation and breach of trust of sexual abuse creates feelings of confusion for the child.

Myth: Sexual abuse is non-violent, and therefore non-damaging.

Fact: Sexual abuse of children is an act of violence, even if there are no physical injuries. Children who are child sexual abuse victims are: denied a childhood, denied a loving, nurturing relationship of trust, and exploited and betrayed by a person who is in a position of authority and trust.

Myth: Children lie about child sexual abuse.

Fact: Children do not have the explicit sexual knowledge necessary to describe phenomena they have not experienced. Children do not have the cognitive capacities to make up stories of sexual abuse. If children lie about sexual abuse it is most often to say that it did not occur, in order to protect the offender and/or the family unit.

A copy of this Newsletter can be found on the Archdiocese of Milwaukee website www.archmil.org under Safeguarding All of God's Family.

Myth: Children are seductive.

Fact: No. Humans are born sexual beings and children have a natural curiosity about their bodies. They need and seek safe, appropriate and healthy physical affection. Sexual offenders exploit children's curiosity and their need for affection. Children who are sexually abused learn, usually at a very young age, that the price they have to pay for attention and affection is sexual activity. This learned sexually reactive behavior is interpreted by adults as seductive.

Myth: Child sexual abuse is a one or two time occurrence, involving a single child.

Fact: Child sexual abuse typically goes on for quite some time before discovery. It is not confined to one child, but usually involves several children. In incestuous families the abuse often effects more than one child, but may effect each in different ways.

Myth: It is better not to talk about child sexual abuse - the child will forget.

Fact: Child sexual abuse victims may temporarily block memories of what has happened but the effects will surface as they grow. Not talking about what happened will not make it go away but encourages it to fester. Adults often do not talk about child sexual abuse because of their own discomfort with the topic. If adults are not willing to talk about the abuse, the child will probably feel there is something to be ashamed of, that it is dirty and just too awful to talk about. This attitude will only serve to increase the child's feelings of guilt, shame and feelings of being abnormal and will compound their problems.



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