

# **Archdiocese of Cincinnati**



## **How to Protect Your Children from Child Abuse: A Guide for Parents and Guardians**

# How to Protect Your Children From Child Abuse: A Guide for Parents and Guardians

Cómo Proteger a Sus Hijos del Abuso Infantil: Una Guía Para los Padres  
Disponibile en español en su oficina de los Archidiócesis de Cincinnati.

## Message to Parents and Guardians

*"Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked them, but Jesus said, "Let the children come to me, and do not prevent them; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." MT 19:13-14*

Our Lord had a special love for children. Jesus welcomes the children to him and assures them of a place in the kingdom. Parents and guardians strive to offer that same love and care for their children and to provide for their formation, safety and well-being. Children are often faced with choices affecting their development and safety. Parents and guardians do their best to provide education and guidance to prepare their children to make the best decisions. One way they do this is to talk with their children. Some subjects are easy to discuss with children—sports, their grades in school, and many other features of their daily lives. Other things are much more difficult to discuss including child abuse—especially child sexual abuse.

Although discussing child abuse with your children may be difficult for you, it is very important. Research shows that children whose parents and guardians talk to them about preventing sexual abuse are more effective at fending off assaults. Discussing such topics with children is perhaps the most important step a parent can take to protect his or her child.

Open communication between parents and guardians and children about serious topics such as abuse, particularly child sexual abuse, offers children reassurance that no matter how frightening something may be, their parents and guardians will be there to help. Unfortunately, a significant threat to the safety of children is adults who sexually molest children. A key to keeping children safe from these individuals is children's ability to seek help from trusted adults anytime they are hurt or feel scared or uncomfortable. We feel that parents and guardians are the preferred source of this help. It is recommended in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati's *Decree on Child Protection* that "parents should strive diligently to develop good communication with their children and to alleviate any tensions that may interfere with good communication. Parents should avail themselves of 'teachable moments' to discuss with their children in a positive fashion the realities of child abuse." It is recommended that these conversations take place in the context of broader conversations on healthy bodies and healthy relationships. In addition to these important conversations with your child we encourage you to pray to the Lord for guidance and for the safety of your child.

We do not expect that your child will become a victim of child abuse. It is extremely important, however, that if your child ever faces an abusive situation, he/she knows that there are adults in his/her life who will listen and respond in a supportive manner. The purpose of this booklet is to provide a resource that will help you and your child communicate about this important topic in order to improve your child's safety.

## Using This Booklet

This booklet is divided into four sections. The first section contains information for parents and guardians about healthy and unhealthy relationships. The second section contains information on child abuse. The third section covers a series of frequently asked questions to help protect your child. The fourth section contains contact information for local agencies and the Archdiocese of Cincinnati.

## Healthy vs. Unhealthy Relationships

It is the responsibility of parents and guardians to form their children in healthy and loving relationships and to help them identify and avoid relationships that are dangerous and uncomfortable. Doing this depends on your example, your witness in your dealings with others, and your constant efforts to create in your homes an atmosphere that is open and that reflects God's love for all humanity.

There are four basic relationships in interactions with others: Love, Infatuation, Friendship, and Exploitation\*. We gradually come to understand the meaning of these relationships as we grow and mature. Parents and guardians are responsible for providing age-appropriate understanding of each of these relationships.

What constitutes healthy relationships and how do we educate toward them?

### Love

Characteristics: grounded in and shaped by faith and God's love for us, leads us beyond ourselves and toward the Divine, concern and care for the other, forgiving and reconciling, and unconditional acceptance.

We can help our children/youth understand love by:

1. Loving them unconditionally.
2. Teaching them respect for themselves and for one another.
3. Providing them clear expectations for social activities.
4. Giving them support and affirmation.
5. Witnessing a reverence for married love and the sacredness of sex through our interaction with each other.

### Infatuation

Characteristics: the feeling of being in love, being interested in someone of the other gender, and sexual attraction to another.

We can help our children/youth understand infatuation by:

1. Helping them to see that sexual attraction is good, but that it needs to be controlled by love.
2. Setting boundaries for children and teaching them how to set their own boundaries.
3. Helping them recognize the role of hormones in relationships.
4. Helping them understand the different kinds of touch and what is appropriate when.

### Friendship

Characteristics: like being with one another, having fun together, trusting one another, being comfortable with one another, and sharing interests and hobbies.

We can help our children/youth understand friendship by:

1. Teaching children how to make friends, how to be a friend, and how to interact with friends.
2. Helping them know how to interact with those who are not in their circle of friends.
3. Encouraging them to show kindness to any of their peers who seem to have few friends.
4. When they are adolescents, helping them to understand that friendship should be the most important component in a romantic relationship.

### Exploitation

Characteristics: unhealthy or bad relationships in which one person uses, abuses, or hurts another to get what one wants or to feel good about oneself at the expense of someone else, relationship is based on selfishness and lack of respect for others.

Parents can help their children/youth understand exploitation by:

1. Helping children recognize actions that are exploitive, such as bullying, teasing, gossip, making fun, revenge, hitting, not sharing, name calling, tattling, getting even, pushing, giving hugs that are uncomfortable, being possessiveness in relationships, etc.
2. Giving them directions on how to deal with inappropriate behavior.
3. Letting them know that they can confide in you, their parent or guardian, and that you will help them.

\* *Learning about LIFE: A Family-based Program on Relationships and Abuse Prevention*, Kieran Sawyer, SSND and Kathie Amidei, Ave Maria Press, ©2006. The acronym LIFE stands for the four types of relationships outlined in this resource. The premise of this program is that parents have the primary responsibility for providing their children with information on sexuality and protecting them from abuse. Pope Benedict XVI, in *Deus Caritas Est*, uses ancient Greek words to name the three positive relationships: Agape, Eros, Philia, and then talks about relationships that are debased and deceptive, which he calls Vice. **Used with permission.**

## Abuse

The Archdiocesan *Decree on Child Protection* defines child abuse as:

- a. Engaging in sexual activity, as defined under Chapter 2907 of the *Ohio Revised Code*, with a child where such activity would constitute an offense under the Chapter;
- b. Endangering a child as defined in Section 2919.22 of the *Ohio Revised Code*;
- c. Denying to a child, as a means of punishment, proper or necessary subsistence, education, medical care or other care necessary to a child for the child's health;
- d. Using restraint that causes a child pain or injury;
- e. Administering prescription drugs or psychotropic medication to a child without the written approval and ongoing supervision of a licensed physician;
- f. Providing alcoholic beverages or controlled substances to a child. For the purpose of this *Decree on Child Protection*, this does not include the offering of the Precious Blood to someone under the age of 21 within the context of an official Church function;
- g. Committing of any act, other than by accidental means or by actions taken in self-defense or under similar justifiable circumstances, that results in any injury or death to a child or commission of any act by accidental means that results in any injury or death to a child and that is at variance with the history given of the injury or death;
- h. Inflicting by any individual of physical or mental injury that threatens to harm a child's health or welfare.

## Types of abuse

**Neglect:** failure of a parent or guardian to provide food, clothing, shelter, medical care, education, and supervision.

**Physical Abuse:** any non-accidental physical injury to a child caused by an adult which results in or threatens serious injury. This may include unreasonable punishment, or punishment that is too harsh.

- Can include bruises, broken bones, burns, and abrasions;
- Injuries on the abdomen or back, or not typical childhood injuries, could indicate that the child has been abused.

### Emotional Abuse:

- Harder to recognize but is just as harmful;
- Damages the child's self-esteem;
- In extreme cases, can cause developmental problems and speech disorders.

Examples: constantly ridiculing, rejecting, blaming, or having unrealistic expectations in academic or athletic achievement, comparing a child unfavorably with brothers, sisters, or other children.

**Bullying, Harassment, Intimidation:**

- An intentional written, verbal, or physical act a child exhibits toward another child on more than one occasion which causes mental or physical harm to the other child; or creates an intimidating, threatening, or abusive environment for the other child.

**Sexual Abuse:**

- Any physical contact with a child by an adult or older child in a position of power over the child for the sexual gratification of the molester;
- Might use tricks, bribes, pressure, threats, club initiations, or any force to persuade the child;
- Approximately one-third of sexual molestations are committed by other children;
- This kind of sexual activity is serious and should not be ignored.

Parents and guardians and others who work with children need to distinguish between normal sexual behavior of children and abusive behavior. All children are curious about sexual behavior as a part of growing up. Sexual behavior is abusive any time it involves an adult or when it is forced by another child. When parents and guardians are concerned about their child’s sexual behavior, they should try to talk with him/her and discuss their specific concerns.

**Frequently Asked Questions**

**How can I tell if my child has been abused?** If any of the following signs are present it is possible that your child has been abused:

- When your child says that someone hurt him/her, scared him/her, or made him/her feel uncomfortable;
- Physical signs or behavioral changes that give parents and guardians and other caregivers clues that abuse may have occurred;
- Unexplained burns, bites, bruises, broken bones, or black eyes;
- Injuries to or around the genitals;
- Bruises or other marks in various stages of healing indicative of repeated beatings or physical assaults;
- Refusing to go to a friend’s or relative’s home for no apparent reason, for example, “I just don’t like him/her anymore;”
- Unexplained behavioral changes such as unhappiness, bed-wetting, clinging behavior, acting out or aggressive behavior, crying for no apparent reason, inability to concentrate, changes in school performance, self-inflicted harm, and symptoms of illnesses;
- Acting out adult sexual behavior or sexually explicit language a young child is unlikely to know.

**Note:** It is important to note that there are many other events in a child’s life that can also create stress, such as family turmoil, drug abuse by a parent, divorce, death of a close relative or a pet, and moving. As a parent, you may be able to identify and help your child cope with such unfortunate occurrences

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

- remain as calm as possible
- show real concern, but NOT alarm or anger, when questioning your child about possible child abuse.

**Note:** Explosive displays of emotion in front of your child may cause your child to feel guilty about being responsible for the abuse or about being responsible for upsetting you. In either case, it will not be helpful to your child.

- If your suspicion of abuse is caused by something you observed—a change in behavior, unexplained injury, or avoidance of a particular person—ask your child about it. Use your unique knowledge of your child to select words that will encourage openness.
- The first consideration should be the safety and well-being of your child. If there is an indicator of injury, your child should be seen by your family’s doctor. You should also contact your local child protective services agency and report your suspicions.

### **What should I do if my child tells me he/she has been sexually abused?**

**Remain calm** and do not overreact to the information disclosed by your child.

**Don’t** criticize your child or claim that your child misunderstood what happened.

**Do** respect your child’s privacy and take your child to a place where the two of you can talk without interruptions or distractions.

**Do** reassure your child that he is not to blame for what happened. Tell the child that you appreciate being told about the incident and will help make sure it won’t happen again.

**Do** encourage your child and participate with him or her, to tell the proper authorities what happened but try to avoid repeated interviews that can be stressful to the child.

**Do** consult your pediatrician or other child abuse authority about the need for medical care or counseling for your child.

**Do** report what your child has told you to the appropriate civil authorities. See contact information at the end of this handbook.

### **How can I tell if someone is a child molester?**

- People who victimize children are not easy to identify. If your child has been sexually abused, do not blame yourself or your child
- Child molesters look and act quite normal except for their interest in children.
- They come from all walks of life and all socioeconomic levels.
- Often they have positions of status—they go to church, hold regular jobs, and are active in the community.
- Child molesters are sometimes very skilled at controlling and using children, often by giving them excessive attention, gifts, and money.
- They use their skills on parents and guardians and other adults, disguising their abusive behavior behind friendship and care for the child.
- They often establish relationships with children through organizations and then use those relationships to gain access to children outside the protective environment offered by the organization.

- You should be concerned about any adult or older youth who wants to spend an unusual amount of time alone with your child.

### **How can I talk with my child about sexual abuse?**

#### **If you are uncomfortable discussing sexual abuse with your child, let him/her know.**

When parents and guardians who are uncomfortable discussing sexual abuse with their children try to hide their uneasiness, the children may misinterpret the anxiety and be less likely to come to you when they need help. You can use a simple statement like, “I wish we didn’t have to talk about this. I’m uncomfortable because I don’t like to think this could happen to you. I want you to know that it’s important and you can come to me whenever you have a question or if anybody ever tries to abuse you.”

#### **Select words your child understands.**

One of the primary concerns of parents and guardians is finding words to explain sexual abuse. If you are uncomfortable using the names of body parts, use whatever terms your child understands.

#### **Provide an opportunity for your child to practice youth protection skills.**

Learning is more effective when children have a chance to practice the skills they are taught. Discuss safety rules with your child.

### **What are good safety rules?**

**Check first** with a parent or other trusted adult before you change plans, go anywhere, or accept anything from anyone. Children need to understand that their safety is greater when parents and guardians or the adult responsible for caring for them knows where they are and what they are doing.

**Go with a friend** in order to be safer and to have more fun. The friend should be a parent, other trusted adult, or older child.

**People shouldn’t touch places covered by your swimming suit or do things that you think are wrong.** It is your body and you have the right to say no to anyone who tries to touch you in a wrong way. Children need to be empowered to set personal limits about their bodies and to resist anyone who fails to respect those limits.

**Tell a trusted adult** anytime you are hurt, scared, or made to feel uncomfortable. Children need help in recognizing whom they should trust. Parents and guardians are in the best position to help children identify the adults in their lives deserving this trust. You can also reassure your child that he or she will not be in trouble when they come to you for help. It’s very important that children understand they are not at fault when an adult or older child harms them or tries to harm them.

**Note:** Children benefit from having concrete safety rules. It is important, however, to stress that traditional cautions about “strangers” are not sufficient to protect our children. It may be hard for a child to differentiate between a stranger and someone who is known but not considered a trusted adult. In addition, individuals who harm children are usually known to the child. Children need to rely upon adult guidance to improve their safety.

#### **Teach Internet Safety Rules**

Most children are learning to use the Internet for schoolwork and for the many fun things available for children on the Internet. Children need to learn that in addition to many acceptable uses, using the Internet can place them in danger if they don’t follow the rules. The NetSmartz Studio, a subsidiary of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, suggests that children make the following pledge:

1. I will talk with my parents or guardian so we can set up rules for going online. The rules will include the time of day I may be online, the length of time I may be online, whom I may communicate with while online, and appropriate areas for me to visit while online. I will not break these rules or access other areas without their permission.
2. I will tell a trusted adult if I come across anything that makes me feel scared, uncomfortable, or confused. I will not download anything from anyone without permission from my parents or guardian.
3. I will never share personal information such as my address, my telephone number, my parents' or guardian's work address/telephone number, or the name and location of my school without my parents' or guardian's permission.
4. I will never respond to any messages that are mean or in any way make me feel uncomfortable. If I do get a message like that, I will tell a trusted adult right away so he or she can contact the online service. And I will not send those kinds of messages.
5. I will never meet in person with anyone I have first "met" online without checking with my parents or guardian. If my parents or guardian agrees to the meeting, it will be in a public place and my parents or guardian must come along.

**Note:** Many parents and guardians feel that teaching children about sexual abuse will take away the innocence of childhood. Many children are at risk of sexual abuse because they do not have the maturity to understand why a child molester would want to look at, touch, or otherwise violate them. This, in part, explains why children who are sexually abused at a young age do not realize they were abused until they are older. It also explains a child's confusion if parents and guardians or other adults respond emotionally when he discloses sexual abuse.

## **Sources of Child Abuse Prevention Information**

### **National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information**

330 C St., SW

Washington, DC 20447

Phone: 800-394-3366 or 703-385-7565; fax: 703-385-3206

E-mail: [nccanch@caliber.com](mailto:nccanch@caliber.com)

<http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov>

### **Prevent Child Abuse America**

200 South Michigan Ave., 17th Floor

Chicago, IL 60604-2404

312-663-3520; fax: 312-939-8962

[www.preventchildabuse.org](http://www.preventchildabuse.org)

### **National Center for Missing & Exploited Children**

699 Prince St.

Alexandria, VA 22314-3175

800-843-5678

[www.missingkids.com](http://www.missingkids.com)

[www.netsmartz.org](http://www.netsmartz.org)



## Contact Numbers to Report Allegations of Child Abuse Resources: County Children's Protective Services

Adams County	Children's Services .....	937.544.2511
Auglaize County	Children's Services .....	419.739.6505
	Sheriff's Office (After Hours) .....	419.739.6565
Brown County	Dept. of Jobs & Family Services .....	937.378.6104
	Children's Services (After Hours) .....	937.378.4435
Butler County	Children's Services .....	513.887.4055
Champaign County	Children's Services (Day).....	800.837.4290
	Sheriff's Office (After Hours) .....	937.652.1311
Clark County	Dept. of Jobs and Family Services (intake) ...	937.327.1748
	(After Hours).....	937.324.8687
Clermont County	Children's Protective Services.....	513.732.7173
	(After Hours).....	513.732.2231
Clinton County	Children's Services .....	937.382.5935
	(After Hours).....	937.382.2449
Darke County	Children's Services .....	937.548.4132
	Sheriff's Office (After Hours) .....	937.548.2020
Greene County	Children's Services .....	937.562.6600
	From Dayton .....	937.427.2883
	(After Hours).....	937.879.4357
	From Fairborn .....	937.878.1415
Hamilton County	(After Hours).....	937.372.4357
	Children's Protective Services (Hotline) .....	513.241.KIDS (513.241.5437)
Highland County	Children's Services .....	937.393.3111
	Sheriff's Office (After Hours) .....	937.393.1421
Logan County	Children's Services .....	937.599.7290
Mercer County	Children's Services .....	419.586.5106
	Sheriff's Office (After Hours) .....	419.586.7724
Miami County	Children's Services .....	937.335.4103
	(After Hours-Goes to 911 Center) .....	937.440.9911
Montgomery County	Children's Services .....	937.224.5437
Preble County	Children's Services .....	937.456.1135
Shelby County	Dept. of Jobs & Family Services .....	937.498.4981
	Sheriff's Office (After Hours) .....	937.498.1111
Warren County	Children's Protective Services.....	513.695.1546
	(After Hours).....	513.695.1600

**If the number is not listed as a HOTLINE,  
ask for the Children's Intake Worker before beginning the report.**

Updated 5/2008

In addition to reporting to civil authorities, if you believe that a child has been abused by a cleric or employee of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati you should make a report to:

Chancellor

Archdiocese of Cincinnati  
100 E. 8<sup>th</sup> Street  
Cincinnati, Ohio 45202  
Telephone: (513) 421-3131  
Fax: (513) 421-6225  
E-mail: [communications@catholiccincinnati.org](mailto:communications@catholiccincinnati.org)

The Website of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati is [www.CatholicCincinnati.org](http://www.CatholicCincinnati.org).

This document is based in large part on a document written by the *Boy Scouts of America*, *How To Protect Children From Child Abuse: A Parent's Guide*. We owe them a debt of gratitude for allowing us to use their work in the writing of our local document.

**BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA**

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