

## **Archdiocese of Dubuque Children and Adolescents Protection Program**

**Introduction:** This material is designed to provide age appropriate lessons on creating a safe environment for parish and school children and adolescents, K-12. The first article gives some general guidance on speaking to young people about child abuse. It is followed by objectives and lesson plans for various grade levels. Please feel free to infuse the lessons into your present curriculum or create a separate opportunity for discussion. The materials are adapted from the Archdiocese of Mobile, *Children and Adolescents Protection Program*, and we gratefully acknowledge their assistance.

### **SPEAKING WITH PARISH/SCHOOL YOUNG PEOPLE ABOUT CHILD ABUSE**

**•Remember in “talking” with young people, seek first to listen and understand what the young people might be thinking or feeling.**

Ask them about their questions, concerns, and issues. Their issues are certainly not all the same as ours.

Try to understand what young people have heard from the media, teachers, parents, and friends. So much of what they hear from friends and family can be distorted. Unfortunately, much of the bad news that they are hearing in the media will be accurate.

Please remember in speaking with groups or individuals that some young people will have abuse in their background. Always be sensitive to this. Be pastoral. This is an opportunity to express feelings, fears, confusions, and doubts.

**•Before speaking with young people:**

Pray. Ask God for the guidance and wisdom you will need.

Take time on your own to honestly assess your thoughts and feelings about child abuse, especially sexual abuse by adults who are in positions of trust like clergy, principals, teachers, youth ministers. You may find it helpful to process these thoughts and feeling with a mentor or spiritual director. It is important to know where you are with the issue.

If you are not comfortable with talking about child /sexual abuse, find someone who is.

**•When we speak, be honest. Here are some things you might consider addressing:**

Lack of honesty has caused some of our problems. Secrecy may have been intended to spare both victims and perpetrators from embarrassment, but it has led only to greater harm in most cases. All professions are made up of human beings. We see both good and bad behaviors in all of the professions.

The sexual abuse of children is found in the general population, including other churches, in professions where there are coaches and teachers as well as other youth-serving organizations. Let young people know that those who are victims of abuse are victims of violence and that one victim is one too many. When abuse by a member of the clergy or church personnel occurs, victims often lose trust in authority and church. The church seeks to restore any broken relationship. This is sometimes difficult. This is the humanness of the Church. It is good to reiterate, the school, the religious education classes, the youth ministry program are part of the Catholic Church. It is not healthy to separate “the church” from these other areas. We are all church.

Talk to young people about the importance of getting help for their friends (or selves) that are victims of abuse. Make sure conversation does not lead to “blaming the victim.” It is wrong to say “he’s 15, he should have known better” or “why did she keep seeing him if he was abusing her ... it’s her fault too.” The adult is always in the position of power. That should be made clear.

Be clear about child abuse. Lots of things are getting jumbled in the media. It is helpful to give young people accurate information. Let young people know what is being done in this diocese to safeguard them. Let them know that there is a diocesan policy about those who sexually abuse a child and what it says.

### **Reminders:**

Be age appropriate. Talking with Prekindergarten and Kindergarten will be a whole lot different from talking with middle school six grade students and certainly different from high school students.

Keep your sense of humor - Help the group to be mindful of the effect of inappropriate jokes that are inevitable.

Affirm young people for asking their questions, and stating their opinions. Affirm the courage in victims who have come forward. When appropriate review the principles of “good touch,” “bad touch.”

The church is larger than the persons in charge of the church. We need to help young people see that their faith is larger than individuals or specific crises. The church is ultimately the relationship of our believing community with God across time.

### **Be a Good Role Model**

This would be a good time to highlight things you have done to make the young people feel safe. They can learn much about an environment of safety from your modeling. They should know from watching you:

- Adults are always present when there are activities and events for young people.
- Adults purchase or bring for the group’s use things that are appropriate to young people.
- The “Buddy System” of a young person with another young person when away from campus is a good safety requirement.
- It is not appropriate for an adult to share a bed with young people when on a trip, or for a young person to sit on an adult’s lap.
- If a young person is uncomfortable with a hug, then we do not hug or ridicule that person.
- You meet with young people in areas that are accessible and visible.
- You carefully select volunteers in consultation with others to ensure the quality of adults working with your young people.
- It is always a safe practice to have two adults in the area.

These are all things to keep in mind when working with young people in parishes and schools. They are not meant to be a check list of items to be read to students but rather information to assist the adult leaders to be in an ongoing dialogue with the young people they serve.

**GRADES 5, 6, 7, and 8**  
**CHILD PROTECTION CATECHESIS**  
**TEACHING OBJECTIVES**

1. We are all created in the image and likeness of God. My body is the temple of the Holy Spirit.
2. Our families and trusted adults and teachers share a concern for our safety.
3. We learn to differentiate between safe and unsafe or unwanted touch. We are called to chastity and we have a responsibility to avoid and immediately report any unwanted or unsafe touch to a parent or other trusted adult.
4. We show respect for ourselves and others by the way we talk, act, and live. We must identify respectful and disrespectful language and actions and avoid anyone who fails to respect us. In particular, the areas of our bodies covered by shirts and shorts are private and must not be violated.
5. God gives us the gift of free will. All actions have consequences. We must learn how to discern the implications of the choices we make every day. When we experience the bad choices of others, we must report the offense and get help.
6. The virtue of chastity helps us understand and identify actions or behaviors which are wrong or sinful. Children, young adults must avoid actions or experiences or behaviors which offend against chastity.
7. Secrets can be very harmful to us physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Always, question secret play, secret games and determine how the secrets can cause great harm.
8. There are many different kinds of friendship. Healthy relationships and friendships can help us to understand ourselves, God and others. We can meet false friends who mistreat us or take advantage of our trust and friendship. Poor relationships and false friendships can deeply harm us psychologically, emotionally, spiritually and even physically. People who manipulate or misuse our friendship are not friends. We must report any relationships which can be harmful to us.
9. Good communication with my parents and family members helps keep me safe. I can also help keep younger siblings and others safe by being observant and concerned.
10. My parents and family and other trusted adults will listen to me and help me. Make a list of three trusted adults who will listen to me and help me. I will make a list of the three trusted adults I can go to with any problem in addition to my parents and family members. My parents and I will make the list together.

**LESSON PLANS**  
**GRADES 5, 6, 7, and 8**  
**Child Protection Catechesis**

1. Ask the students if they are aware of any current news stories or events relating to the endangerment or abuse of children.
2. Explain that families and schools share a special responsibility for helping keep them safe. An important part of being safe is to have information and caring support of families and trusted adults. (You might talk about the Amber Alert System and how communities are a part of providing safety for children and young people.)
3. Ask students what safety cautions or rules their parents have given them to protect themselves.
4. Explain to the student that we will read and discuss a “Keeping Safe” handout together to give them information and safety precautions to be protected.
5. Read through and discuss the “Keeping Safe” handout. Be sure to emphasize respectfulness throughout the discussion. Also emphasize that healthy friendships and relationships are not manipulative or exploitive.
6. Encourage the students to continue good and trusting relationships with parents and to learn to identify other trusted adults in their families or community who can help and support them.
7. On the last line of the handout is space for the students and their parents to identify and list three trusted adults other than their parents to whom they may go for help. Their final task is to complete the handout at home with their parents and put it in a prominent and accessible place.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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- My parents and family members and other trusted adults will listen to me and help me. My parents and I choose three trusted adults I may go to for help:

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