

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month

Don't Wait: Everyday Actions To Keep Kids Safe

The most effective prevention happens before a child is harmed. Kids are immediately safer when parents and caregivers take the time to learn about sexual abuse and its warning signs. Parents and caregivers who make a commitment to speak up as soon as they have a concern, instead of waiting for certain evidence of harm, play an even more crucial role in a child's safety.

Here are some things that you and your family can do to protect children from sexual abuse, right now.

Set and respect clear guidelines

- Set and respect family boundaries. All members of the family have rights to privacy in dressing, bathing, sleeping and other personal activities. If anyone does not respect these rights, an adult should clearly enforce the family rules.
- Demonstrate boundaries by showing in your own life how to say "no." Teach your children that their "no" will be respected, whether it's in playing or tickling or hugging and kissing. For instance, if your child does not want to give Grandma a kiss, let the child shake hands instead. And make sure, too, that Grandma understands why a child's ability to say 'no' is important for the safety of the child.
- Use the proper names of body parts. Just as you teach your children that a nose is a nose, they need to know what to call their genitals. This knowledge gives children the correct language for understanding their bodies, for asking questions and for telling about any behavior that

could lead to sexual abuse.

- Be clear with adults and children about the difference between "okay touch" and inappropriate touch. For younger children, teach more concrete rules such as "talk with me if anyone – family, friend or anyone else – touches your private parts." Also teach kids that it is unacceptable to use manipulation or control to touch someone else's body.
- Explain the difference between a secret and a surprise. Both the adults and children in your life need to know how secrets may make kids unsafe. Surprises are joyful and generate excitement in anticipation of being revealed after a short period of time. Secrets exclude others, often because the information will create upset or anger. When keeping secrets with just one person becomes routine, children are more vulnerable to abuse.

Watch out for signs

- Watch for any inappropriate behaviors in other adults or older youth because children, especially young ones, are not as able to recognize these behaviors or to protect themselves.
- Stay on top of your children's use of technology – Internet, email, instant messaging, webcam use, peer-to-peer/social networking sites, and cell phones, including photo exchanges. The illusion of anonymity on these electronic mediums often leads to a breakdown of social rules and expectations, ones that would be assumed if the interactions were face-to-face. Whenever possible, make sure the child's interactions are visible and public.

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"Each of you is a child of God."

Pope Francis



www.usccb.org

Every known or reasonably suspected situation of child abuse or neglect must be reported as soon as possible to:

The Colorado Child Abuse Report Hotline

1-844-CO-4-KIDS

For Emergencies - call 911

Instances involving clergy, employees, or volunteers of the Diocese of Colorado Springs, its Parishes or Schools, must also be reported to:

Office of Child and Youth Protection

Diocese of Colorado Springs

Online at diocs.org (*Reporting Abuse tab*)

or Call 719-866-6499/719-866-6479

or After-hours/Weekends/Holidays Reporting Line:

719-866-6505

The Office of Child and Youth Protection will respond promptly and with compassion to all reports of misconduct.



Diocese of Colorado Springs

Office of Child and Youth Protection

ocyp@diocs.org

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- Kids, and even adults, can easily stumble into inappropriate or even dangerous situations and exchanges.

Speak up

- Practice talking before there's a problem. Say the "difficult" or "embarrassing" words out loud so that you become more comfortable using those words, asking those questions, and confronting those behaviors. Having stress-free conversations about difficult issues with both the adults and children in your life gets everyone in the habit of talking openly and honestly. Show those people in your life that you will listen to anything they have to say, even if it's about something embarrassing or something they've done wrong.
- Speak up when you see, or are subject to, any inappropriate behaviors. Interrupt and talk with the person who is making you uncomfortable. If you feel you can't do this, find someone who is in a position to intervene. The person behaving inappropriately might need help to stop these behaviors.
- Report anything you know or suspect might be sexual abuse. If nobody speaks up, the abuse will not stop.

Support your kids

- Make it clear that you will support your children when they request privacy or say "no" to an activity or a kind of touch that makes them uncomfortable.
- Talk to your kids about who you/they trust. Give your kids permission to talk to these trustworthy adults whenever they feel scared, uncomfortable or confused about someone's behavior toward them.

Be prepared

- Create a clear and easy-to-follow Family Safety Plan. Make sure that as adults, you know how to challenge each other when you see any inappropriate behaviors.
- Create a list noting both who to talk to when you see behavior you are unsure about and who to call if you believe you need to report sexual abuse. Teach the children about what to do and who to talk with if they are sexually threatened or touched by someone.
- Make a list of people and organizations you can call for advice, information, and help. You can be a resource to your family and friends about how to report abuse and how to get help for everyone involved. If you know that a child has been sexually abused, be sure to get help for the child quickly, so the harm can be stopped and healed.

Understanding the tools of sexual abuse prevention builds your confidence that you have the power and knowledge to keep your kids safe. Remember, the most effective prevention involves taking action before any abuse occurs. Prevention can start in your home today. You can start it now. (Used with permission from StopItNow.org)

Hotline Numbers:

- Child Abuse (Colorado) 1-844-CO-4-KIDS (1-844-264-5437)
- Child Abuse (National) 1-800-4-A-CHILD (1-800-422-4453)
- National Domestic Violence 1-800-799-SAFE (1-800-799-7233)
- National Parent Helpline 1-855-4-A-PARENT (1-855-427-2736)
- National Human Trafficking 1-888-373-7888 Text INFO or HELP to BeFree (233733)
- Colorado Human Trafficking 1-866-455-5075 Text 720-999-9724
- Mental Illness 1-800-950-NAMI (1-800-950-6264)
- Substance Abuse 1-800-662-HELP (1-800-662-4357)
- Suicide Prevention 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255)
- Youth in Trouble/Runaways 1-800-RUNAWAY (1-800-786-2929)

What's being done in our own diocese to help victims/survivors of abuse, and protect children, youth and the vulnerable?

- ◇ We report all allegations of abuse directly to law enforcement and cooperate with civil authorities on all investigations.
- ◇ Our diocese has designated Victim Advocates whose primary role is to accompany survivors and provide resources for their healing journey.
- ◇ We also have an independent review board, consisting primarily of lay members. The role of the review board is to review allegations and make a recommendation to the bishop regarding the suitability for ministry.
- ◇ We train adults on how to maintain a safe environment by using "A Child's Safety is an Adult's Job" training program.
- ◇ We train minors in parish religious education programs and in Catholic schools to identify warning signs of abuse and inappropriate behavior, as well as how to report abuse.
- ◇ By following all of our diocesan policies and procedures to create safe environments, we can maintain a culture of protection and healing.

A PRAYER FOR HEALING VICTIMS OF ABUSE

God of endless love,
ever caring, ever strong,
always present, always just:
You gave your only Son
to save us by his blood on the cross.



Gentle Jesus, shepherd of peace,
join to your own suffering
the pain of all who have been hurt
in body, mind, and spirit
by those who betrayed the trust placed in them.



Hear the cries of our brothers and sisters
who have been gravely harmed,
and the cries of those who love them.
Soothe their restless hearts with hope,
steady their shaken spirits with faith.
Grant them justice for their cause,
enlightened by your truth.



Holy Spirit, comforter of hearts,
heal your people's wounds
and transform brokenness into wholeness.
Grant us the courage and wisdom,
humility and grace, to act with justice.
Breathe wisdom into our prayers and labors.
Grant that all harmed by abuse may find peace in justice.
We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.