

Safe Environment is a broad topic that covers many areas. The Bishops' Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People focuses on preventing child sexual abuse. Toward that end, the Catholic Church has implemented safeguards to ensure that those adults who work with minors have been carefully screened and trained, and are supervised as they interact with our children.

Child abuse, among other reasons, is sometimes the cause of teenage suicide. The U.S. currently ranks second in the world in the number of these tragic deaths. We need to educate ourselves about this area and be ready to intervene when we see warning signs in our young people.

Suicide Hotlines:

National: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

**Colorado Crisis and Support Line:
1-844-493-TALK (8255)**

**To report child abuse, call
1-844-CO-4-KIDS
(1-844-264-5437)**

**To report to the diocese, call
(719) 866-6505**

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Keeping Kids Safe



Diocese of Colorado Springs
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DEAR PARENTS, TEACHERS, AND OTHER CONCERNED ADULTS:

The Diocese of Colorado Springs is committed to providing a safe environment for all who worship, work, volunteer, or attend education and formation opportunities at our parishes and schools. We are determined to do everything to keep our children safe.

Statistics show that the vast majority of children who are abused (93%) know their abusers and the vast majority of abusers (95-97%) are male. One of the best protections we have to ensure the safety of our children is to develop and maintain an environment of trust in the home, where children are confident that they can talk to their parents about any topic, any fear, and any experience they are having.

Potential abusers are less likely to target children who have such an open relationship with their parents or other significant adults, since abusers depend upon secrecy to perpetrate their deviancy. Studies show that abusers seek children who are most vulnerable to their methods, such as those who are starved for attention or those whose relationship with their parents is strained. Their methods depend upon establishing a relationship of trust with children and/or their parents in order to have opportunities to offend.

The best thing that we can do to protect children, in addition to maintaining an atmosphere of trust, is to be alert to adults or older children who take a particular interest in a child, especially to the exclusion of healthy relationships with their own peers.

This document contains talking points and best practices for parents and educators to use to empower children to be safe from those who would do them harm.



What to Discuss With Children (through grade 5)

- If you ever get separated from your mom or dad while shopping, don't wander around. Go to a checkout counter or to someone who works there and tell them you lost your parents.
- You should never get into a car or go anywhere with anyone unless your parents told you it is okay, even if the person says it's an emergency.
- If an adult asks you for help or a car pulls up near you, run away in the opposite direction without answering. Never believe it if someone tells you that they need your help to find their puppy or kitten or for any other reason.
- Never answer the door if you are home alone.
- Never go places alone; go with a friend.
- Never leave the yard or play area without telling your parents.
- Tell your parents if anyone touches you on the parts of your body that a bathing suit covers.
- Let your parents know right away if someone tells you to keep a secret.
- Tell your parents right away if someone gives you a gift.
- Just because someone knows your name, does not mean that you or your parents know them.



What to Discuss With Youth (through high school)

- Minors are not contractually obligated without their parents' written consent.
- Tell your parents if anyone offers you a job, or wants to hire you. Tell that person that you must first get your parents' permission.
- Walk with confidence and purpose in public and always be aware of your surroundings.
- If you are ever stopped by someone claiming to be the police and you have any doubt about that claim, ask for another policeman to be summoned to verify the first person's identity.
- Dating should be a fun experience and you should never allow yourself to be coerced into doing anything that you know is wrong.
- Establish your boundaries clearly with anyone you are with. "Date rape" accounts for the vast majority of teenage rapes. Remember that "No" means no and should be respected and accepted.
- It is okay to "make a scene" to stop someone from taking advantage of you.
- If you are ever in an uncomfortable situation and need a ride home, call your parents and they will come and get you, and you will not get in trouble.
- Never do something with your peers that you would not do if your parents were present.

Best Practices for Parents

- Know where your children are at all times; be familiar with their friends and activities.
- Know the family composition of the homes where your children play. Is there adult supervision? Are there older brothers and/or male teenage friends around? Does the single mom have a boyfriend present?
- Teach your children to trust their feelings and give them permission to say "No" to what they think is wrong.
- Be alert to a teenager or adult who is paying an unusual amount of attention to your child.
- Be aware that abusers often become friendly with families to gain trust and access to the children.
- Teach your children to tell you if someone touches them in a way that makes them feel uncomfortable.
- Listen carefully to your children's fears; be accepting and supportive in all your discussions with them.
- Monitor children's computer use. Report issues to the Internet Service Provider and/or police. Block sender.
- Charge your child's cell phone in your bedroom overnight; sexting and cyber-bullying often take place at night.
- Never force children to touch, hug, or kiss someone if they do not want to. If they are forced to do this, it signals to them that adults can impose themselves on children, and not respect their boundaries.
- Be sensitive to changes in your children's behavior and discuss your concerns with them.
- Ask your children if anyone makes them feel uncomfortable, or has touched them where they shouldn't.

Bullying

Bullying is the abusive use of force or coercion in order to intimidate. Cyberbullying is the posting or sending of cruel gossip to damage a person's reputation.

Victims of bullying can become depressed and suicidal. Bullying often is not reported for fear of reprisal. Bullying takes place in nearly 50% of schools.

Signs of bullying

- Has damaged or missing clothing.
- Has unexplained injuries.
- Complains frequently of headaches or feeling sick.
- Fears going to school or acts differently than usual.
- Has fewer friends or is excluded from activities.
- Loses interest in schoolwork or grades plummet.
- Abruptly stops using the computer.
- Is withdrawn, acts depressed, or speaks of suicide.

Ways to deal with bullying

- Tell an adult immediately.
- Veer around a bully and stay out of reach.
- Carry yourself with purpose. Stand tall, put hands up in front of body, say "Stop" with conviction.
- Bystander children (not directly involved) can be encouraged to say "Stop" to the perpetrators.
- Empathize with the child's hurt feelings.
- Download written bullying communications.
- Report to the Internet Service Provider and police. Block sender.
- Check children's online activity & privacy settings.
- Establish an agreement about internet use.
- Bullying of a minor is child abuse and should be treated as such.



Suicide Awareness

Warning Signs

- Dramatic changes in a youth's mood or behavior.
- Unstable moods.
- Thoughts of suicide expressed, threatened, written or otherwise hinted at. Efforts to find means to suicide, to say goodbye, to distribute possessions to others, or to prepare for death.
- Increased or excessive alcohol or drug use.
- Seeing no reason for living or having no sense of meaning or purpose in life.
- Feeling anxious, agitated, having frequent nightmares, being unable to sleep, or sleeping all the time.
- Being bullied, threatened, or harassed.
- Feeling hopeless about self, others, or the future. Feeling trapped, like there is no way out.
- Withdrawal from family, friends, usual activities, or society at large.
- Feeling rage or uncontrolled anger, seeking revenge for perceived wrongs.
- Acting without regard for consequences, excessively risky behavior.

Responding

- Calmly ask the person what is bothering them and persist in overcoming any hesitancy on their part to talk about it.
- Take the situation seriously without judging.
- Ask if the person is considering suicide or has a plan in mind. This is the best way to find out if a person has been thinking about suicide.
- Let the person know that you care, that they are not alone, that suicidal feelings are temporary, that depression can be treated, and problems can be solved. Offer hope.
- Take the person to a professional specializing in crisis intervention and suicide prevention.
- Do not leave the person alone until help is available and remove means like guns, pills, etc.